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# PRIMER OF RHETORIC AND PROSODY

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## INTRODUCTION

THIS is a book about prose and poetry. It studies these arts from the special point of view of their form and structure. It depends upon the proposition that the true enjoyment of prose and poetry depends upon an understanding of their design.

This proposition is maintained by Boards of Studies all over India today. It is held that the study is in no way beyond the capacity of the student. And rightly so. Moreover, in the writer's experience the study fascinates the student and the interest so easily aroused is regularly maintained. The chief difficulty is that it does not begin soon enough.

This is not the fault of students or teachers or curricula. It is because there is no textbook which is simple and authoritative. This little book tries to fill the gap.

In the first place it tries to be simple. The earlier chapters in both parts, which give the root of the matter, are well within the scope of the Intermediate student. The final chapters (especially that on Blank Verse in the Prosody section) will find their audience normally in the Universities. The enthusiastic Intermediate student, it is hoped, will enjoy it all. For the subjects themselves are inherently simple. The widely spread notion that there is something abstruse about them has no foundation. And that leads to the question of authority.

The question of authority requires longer argument. In Rhetoric there is authority: authority that goes back for two thousand years when the subject was systematized by the Greeks. In the ancient literatures the study of Rhetoric was the study of the spoken word. Today, typically in France and Scotland, it is the study of the written word. The invention of printing made the transition inevitable; and it was made quite naturally.

In Prosody there is not the same unbroken history. The source of authority is the same. The subject was organized by the Greeks and the nomenclature is again largely Greek. But the poetry of every language is written in the metre natural to the rhythm of the language, and every language has its peculiar rhythm. Therein lay a difficulty. The early students of prosody in English (in the second half of the sixteenth century) knew more about Greek and Latin than they did about their own vernacular. Naturally (it was before Shakespeare and Milton) they admired these great literatures more. Their admiration led them to try to impose the prosody of Greek or Latin upon English. That failed. But most unfortunately, while the poets were not led astray, the prosodists very often were. They had this Greek nomenclature and they knew what it meant in Greek. To this day it has never been clearly recognized that it must mean something quite different in English if it is going to make sense.

This book recognizes that it is too late in the day to discard the traditional nomenclature: it also recognizes that it must be interpreted in English without any reference to the ancient literatures.

It is humbug to pretend that the elementary student of the subject must have a knowledge of Greek and Latin.

This error has largely prevented the study of Rhetoric and Prosody in India. And these studies are necessary. Not only that, they are most enjoyable and they belong to a faculty of enjoyment which the Indian student possesses abundantly. And for generations he has been denied that pleasure.

It is an æsthetic commonplace that no one can receive the best pleasure from an art unless he understands its material and the principles of its structure. It is a pedagogic commonplace that no one can acquire true knowledge through a language unless he understands the principles on which it is written. Fortunately, all over India today these commonplaces are being recognized by those in charge of English education.

One further point may be made. The spoken languages in India are coming into their own. On every hand there are most hopeful signs for the blossoming of fine vernacular literatures. When English was a young vernacular four hundred years ago, it learned a great deal, especially about literary forms, from the great literatures of Greece and Rome. In exactly the same way young Indian writers today are glad to learn from English art forms.

So in all these ways the study of Rhetoric and Prosody is vital to the Indian student. This little book is offered to him in the hope that it will help him in his enjoyment of English—and that is the enjoyment of realizing the wonder and the

complexity of the modern world—and to help him possibly as a writer and certainly as a reader of his own language—and that will help to fulfil the promise of the greater India of tomorrow.

L.B.

*Hampstead*

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# RHETORIC



## CHAPTER I

### WORDS

*'Beautiful words are the very and peculiar light of the mind.'*

'A LITERARY man carries about with him in his head a collection of edged tools known as his Vocabulary,' says Mr H. G. Wells. We all carry these tools and we use them every day and all day long. Whatever we do or we don't do we are always using words. Sometimes we think of them as weapons; the most universal weapons at the service of mankind. Whether we use them as tools or as weapons, we should always remember that they are powerful and may be dangerous. We can never afford to be careless about words.

We use words for thinking and speaking, for writing and for reading. The collection differs for each purpose. Our largest collection we use in reading—because in this we have at our disposal the vocabularies of other people. In the writer's context we can catch the meaning of many words which we may not know sufficiently well to use ourselves. The next in size is our thinking and speaking vocabulary, which is bigger than the writing one because we only write words we are very sure of and reject some as unsuitable for writing which are yet good enough in conversation.

We are apt to forget that the art of reading is

difficult and deserves our best energies. In writing and speaking we are no more than ourselves; but reading brings us into contact with the greatest minds, and we must exert ourselves if we are to make full use of the words which they have written. Good writers spend an enormous amount of time and energy in making reading easy for us. 'Easy reading, hard writing' is an old saying, and we take too great advantage of this hard writing. Reading easily, we read carelessly and lose much of our enlarged vocabulary. Again, most of us speak and write on only a few subjects; while, if we are interested in life at all, we read about many subjects. An ordinary daily newspaper will take us over a world of subjects, very often written on with an expert's loving precision. Wide reading, provided it is energetic reading, stretches and exercises the mind.

The range of subject-matter offered us in English today is wider than has ever been known before in any language, and each subject has to some extent its own private collection of words. It is as if English contains many languages. Textbooks on surgery and geology, engineering and psychology might almost be written in four different languages, yet the reader who understands English has the key to them all. A little reflection of this sort shows the kind of intellectual possession a language like English can be. By using such languages as his instruments for thinking, man is achieving power over all material things. The old writers on composition thought of words as instruments by which man could sway his fellow men. The writings of modern

scientists are freeing man from the terrors of nature, disease and famine for the first time in human history.

Today the whole conception of man's life on this planet is changing, because now man can dominate physical forces. That domination would have been impossible but for the words by which scientists think and by which they communicate their thoughts.

But the scientist is not always happy in using words. There cling to them the colours and emotions connected with old meanings. Still more important, there clings to them that fluidity of meaning necessary for emotional compositions in which exactness comes only in the carefully built-up phrase. The scientist is always seeking qualitative and quantitative exactness. Every word must represent as near as possible an exact quality or quantity. There must be no fluidity. For that reason the scientist prefers algebraical formulæ.

It has just been remarked that the scientist does not like the ordinary words of the language because they are coloured by emotion. This colouring sometimes comes from the contexts a word is found in. The context of a word affects its value and power; not only that, it affects its meaning. Take the verb 'runs'. We say:

the boy runs quickly  
the car runs silently  
the prose runs smoothly  
the day runs slowly

In every case there is an underlying idea of movement, but the final idea evoked by the verb is different in each case. The noun 'drive' may

mean a journey in a car, a stroke in the game of tennis or golf, a road, or a mental quality, according to the context. Take the adjective 'dull'. In each of the phrases

a dull day  
a dull boy  
a dull thud

the idea of 'dullness' evoked is different. Take the word 'green' and the dependence on the phrase is still more apparent; for the word, originally a colour name, has collected secondary meanings much more widely separated than in the case of 'dull'. 'A green tree' gives the colour; 'the green of the year' gives an idea of an English spring when trees are green and plants and flowers are young; and 'he is very green' is an extension of that meaning to 'he is young and therefore inexperienced'.

Sometimes the emotional quality of a word does not depend upon context; it is in the meaning of the word itself. This is obvious in words like 'home' and 'mother' which call up particular images of an emotional nature in each of us. Similarly, words like 'Ganges' and 'Himalaya' evoke a definite emotional response.

Furthermore, some words have beauty in themselves, as well as from the ideas they represent: 'evening', 'dawn'. Others, from their use in wonderful passages of literature, acquire colour and quality which is not originally in them. C. E. Montague says,<sup>1</sup> 'a word may well have about it the glamorous prestige of high adventures in

<sup>1</sup> *A Writer's Notes on his Trade* (Chatto & Windus), p. 3.

great company. Think of all the plain word "dust" calls to mind; "Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was." "Dust hath closed Helen's eyes." "All follow this and come to dust." "The way to dusty death." So, to the lover of words, each word may be not a precious stone only, but one that has shone in Solomon's temple or in Cleopatra's hair.' So a word acquires merit from the great and famous phrases in which it has been used.

Certainly a word may change very greatly according to the company it is in. For example, how different is the power and significance of the word 'light' in these sentences: 'I switched on the light'; 'And God said, Let there be light: and there was light.' In the first, the word is commonplace; in the second, magnificent, a striking example of a word becoming 'the very and peculiar light of the mind'.

It comes to this, that in English, as in other uninflected languages, we must not think of single words as the common units of expression, but the phrase. A single word can convey an idea, but usually one which is unrelated: the phrase gives it exactness.

It does not follow that we can afford to be careless about individual words: on the contrary, we must remember that every word in our English vocabulary has its special work to do. The phrase can only be right if the words are right. Exactness and usefulness in writing depend upon the use of the proper word in the proper place.

To consider their usefulness, we may classify words in two ways; according to their functions, and according to their origins. Let us turn our

attention to the first. Some words represent things and we call them nouns. Others represent actions, movement and existence and we call them verbs. These are the two main classes on which all others depend; and if we had only nouns and verbs we could make ourselves intelligible—but in a very cumbrous and limited way. The next classes are adjectives and adverbs, which assist nouns and verbs. ‘He had a dog with a nose and ears’ is a stupid remark for no one thinks of a dog without a nose and ears. But, ‘He had a spaniel dog, with a long nose and longer ears’ tells us clearly about the dog, and the words which make the statement useful are adjectives. Take the pronoun; how cumbrous speech would be without it. How cumbrous this paragraph is:

Mr Pendyce had other peculiarities, in which Mr Pendyce was not too individual. Mr Pendyce was averse to any change in the existing order of things, made lists of everything, and was never really so happy as when talking of Mr Pendyce and Mr Pendyce’s estate. Mr Pendyce had a black spaniel dog called John, with a long nose and longer ears, and John Mr Pendyce had bred till the creature was not happy out of Mr Pendyce’s sight.

Using pronouns it becomes:

Mr Pendyce had other peculiarities, in which he was not too individual. He was averse to any change in the existing order of things, made lists of everything, and was never really so happy as when talking of himself or his estate. He had a black spaniel dog called John, with a long nose and longer ears, whom he had bred himself till the creature was not happy out of his sight.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> GALSWORTHY, *The Country House* (Heinemann).

So we see how the parts of speech all have their necessary work in language.

We come to classification by origin. The words in the Galsworthy paragraph all have a history. They come from two language families; the Teutonic family and the Latin family. The following are from Latin: Peculiarities, individual, averse, order, existing, estate, creature. Most of the rest are Teutonic. The student of rhetoric is always careful to distinguish between these two families in English, because a Latinized<sup>1</sup> vocabulary has a very different effect from a Teutonic one. Let us take two examples from Shakespeare. The great soldier Othello, threatened by the drawn swords of a group of enemies, says:

‘Keep up your bright swords, for the dew will rust them.’

The special quality of that remark is its quiet, unruffled calm. It gets its quality from the simple Teutonic words used. Macbeth, wishing to explain that he will never be able to rid himself of his sense of guilt at murdering Duncan, says his hands would

‘The multitudinous seas incarnadine’.

This gives us a picture of an immense sea with all its green turning to red as Macbeth washes his hands in it, and still the guilty red is on his hands. The Latin vocabulary is used here to give the

<sup>1</sup> Complete rules for the recognition of Latin words cannot be offered. Length is an indication: Dr Johnson had a habit of saying something in brief Teutonic words, and then repeating it in lengthy, sonorous words from the Latin. A useful rule is to study endings—nearly all words ending in *-tion*, *-sion*, *-ence*, *-ent*, *-ant*, *-age*, *-ity*, *-ice* and *-mony* are Latin in origin.

impression of immensity and magnificence. This is its most common effect, but its range is very great and only fails to cover simplicity.

The Teutonic is the native source and is used for the ordinary purposes of life. The Latin mostly came from books in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and is mostly used for bookish work. But the two are very much confused by this time: and while these are the main sources of the language, English welcomes words from any source if they are useful.

The careful worker in words always thinks of the origin of the words he is using. Let us take two examples:

Curious affair in the village yesterday. Owners of land bordering the forest have the right to catch such deer as they find on their land. Now is the season when deer stray, in search of young shoot. They stray about dawn. Villagers organize a sort of surprise for the deer. They arise before dawn and lie in wait. Yesterday morning sixty people caught six deer. The deer were killed in an open yard close to this house, and blood ran in gallons into and down the road.

This is from Arnold Bennett's *Journal*,<sup>1</sup> the private diary of a great writer. The next example is from a historian, Mr H. A. L. Fisher, writing about the intellectual rise of a great people.<sup>2</sup> The subject is noble and calls for considered exposition:

Indian nationalism is a fabric which, with infinite gradations of shade and colour, tends to assume one of two dominant patterns, the first western and constitutional, the second eastern and revolutionary. There is a school of intelligent Indians, who have been soaked in the philosophy of Victorian Liberalism and

<sup>1</sup> Cassell.

<sup>2</sup> *A History of Europe* (Arnold).

have followed with ardent attention the source of the nationalist and emancipating movements of the West.

How differently these sentences read. There is of course a great difference in the sentence structure; but the chief difference is in vocabulary. In the first passage the writer is talking quietly to himself. There are only two obviously Latin words in the passage; 'curious' and 'organize', while one or two words like 'village' and 'bordering' have a remote Latin ancestry. The sentences have a homely ring about them. As the old Greek critic, Longinus, said: 'High language is not for indiscriminate use: for to put great and dignified words on petty trifles is absurd.' Contrast the second passage. The historian is assessing intellectual advance in India in the last three generations. He is addressing a thoughtful audience on a serious subject. He gives it all the weight that is its due. Again and again the stress of the phrases falls on Latin words: 'nationalism—fabric—infinite gradations—dominant'. The obvious difference in quality between the passages depends upon the type of words chosen. The quality and colour of the words is decisive. The words decide the build of the phrases and sentences.

The student of rhetoric looks for beauty appropriate to the subject in the phrase and sentence. He expects beauty of sound and the beauty of intellectual care. Stevenson says: 'Each phrase is to be comely in itself.' The words are to be chosen and the phrase moulded to be beautiful; and the chief beauty of a well-chosen phrase is that it expresses exactly what is to be said in the fewest words.

Words and phrases require our closest attention in reading and in writing. It is not a fantastic idea, and unfortunately not a common one, to imply a morality in the use of words. For criticism of words leads to purity in thought. The use of words is a responsibility we can none of us escape; and it may be one of our greatest pleasures. Mr A. P. Herbert, perhaps the most eloquent advocate today for the careful use of words, says: 'The power and pleasure of words are enduring, and can be enjoyed by all men. They are not the privilege of wealth or intellect or costly education; and they do not suddenly perish. . . . They are not the monopoly of writers, lovers of literature, or lawyers. Every trade and profession is conducted with words. The English language . . . belongs to every subject.'

## CHAPTER II

### USING WORDS TO THE BEST ADVANTAGE

#### *Figures of Speech*

WE must avoid the error of thinking that figures of speech are ornaments, or at best helps which we can do without. We all use and must use figures of speech. They are the most powerful instruments in language. Take, for example, metaphor. Metaphor is the most common and important figure of all, the indispensable servant of teacher and poet and every creative thinker.

In its simplest form METAPHOR says one thing is another. 'He is a lion in the fight' is a stock example. But there is much more in metaphor than that. It is, as has just been said, the great instrument of teachers. Dr Johnson said: 'To illustrate one thing by its resemblance to another has been always the most popular and efficacious art of instruction. There is indeed no other method of teaching that of which one is ignorant but by means of something already known.' So the following passage is an excellent example of the use of metaphor:

On my left a vast area of milk was ruffled here and there with white-cap breakers. A wall of skimmed milk stretched facing me across the sky. But on my right the milky sea was calm: no cloud clotted, with curdled white, the almost transparent whey. Yet even

the sea was not absolutely uniform, but watered and laced with long, low gentle waves that divided the pacific calm.<sup>1</sup>

The writer is in an aeroplane looking down on the clouds and the sea. The reader has never done so, so the writer has to explain the unknown. He does so in terms of the known—milk. He is using metaphor.

A still more subtle use of metaphor is made by the creative thinker and the poet. In the world of thought new ideas come by a process of metaphor; as we say in everyday language, 'one thing leads to another'. The grasping of a new idea is a metaphorical process. This is what Shelley put so well, speaking of poets: 'Their language is vitally metaphorical; that is, it marks the before unapprehended relations of things and perpetuates their apprehension.' That same conception of a unity of idea and design present in all created things is spoken of by the philosopher Bacon: 'The same footsteps in nature impressed upon the various subjects of the world.' Metaphor then is very closely associated with the greatest discoveries in the worlds of thought and feeling.

Having discussed metaphor as an intellectual process in order to illustrate the true importance of figures of speech, it is time to return to the rhetorician's view of it. The rhetorician thinks of figures of speech as affecting an audience.

From his point of view metaphor has two functions: to make clear and to excite. Prose commonly uses metaphor to explain, poetry to excite,

<sup>1</sup> D. GARNETT, *A Rabbit in the Air* (Chatto & Windus).

although obviously either medium on occasion uses the figure with the other intention.

The metaphors of poetry are therefore bolder than those of prose. For poets use metaphor to convey the intensity of their feelings and to produce in the reader an emotion of corresponding intensity. Hazlitt seizes the idea when he describes metaphor in poetry as used to 'relieve the aching sense of pleasure by expressing it in the boldest manner'.

Metaphor in prose is not confined to great writers. Our common speech is full of metaphor. Examine these everyday phrases:

The wish is *father* to the thought.

Coming events cast their *shadows* before.

A word in season.

The sinews of war.

He broke the law.

Once, all these statements were daring language; while now they bring no picture to the mind and serve like direct language. We all use such metaphors and few of us realize that in using them we are using figures of speech. Such metaphors, used so often that reader and writer have ceased to be aware that the words are not used in a literal sense, are called *dead* metaphors. It is scholarly to realize that we are using them; but it would be pedantic to avoid the everyday phrase unless it were necessary to surprise the reader. Dead metaphors, remember, are less vivid than plain language. When a dead metaphor is the current phrase, the ordinary word will surprise.

Metaphors are sometimes 'developed', that is, the likeness is developed in detail. For example:

In the shipwreck of state, trifles float and are preserved while everything solid and valuable sinks to the bottom, and is lost for ever.

That is well done, sensibly and gracefully. But it is not often that subject and metaphor can be appropriately developed in this way. When the opportunity arises, the effect is very pleasant. The great danger in developing metaphors is that the picture may become confused. This is called 'mixing metaphors'. In this example:

I *bridle* in my struggling muse with pain  
That longs to *launch* into a bolder strain

the first metaphor has to do with horses, the next with boats and the last with a singer. The vice is difficult to avoid, and appears on occasion in the simplest metaphor :

a more extended point of view.

A point cannot be extended. That is typical of many phrases in everyday use and warns us that we can never afford to be careless in our use of language.

So like all good things the metaphor can be abused. But at its best it is a very powerful weapon for the writer's task of rousing the reader to the fullest possible understanding of the feelings and ideas which he is trying to express.

The SIMILE is a figure of speech closely related to the metaphor. A simile is the formal or avowed comparison of one thing with another. The nature of the metaphor is to be brief; of the simile to develop, or 'to be prolonged into a succession of particulars'. A metaphor is often expressed in a word; the simile always requires a

phrase. Like the metaphor, the simile aids the understanding, appeals to the feelings and can effect surprise. The comparison need not be so close, for in the simile the point of resemblance is indicated, while in the metaphor the reader is expected to discover it. In the following examples, the first is quite ordinary in its effect of making sure that the idea is clear; while the second does more, it makes the idea exciting.

As in a fleet, the pace of the slowest vessel, so in a class, the pace of the dullest scholar, is necessarily the pace of the whole.

The advance of the public mind resembles the rising of the tide. Each successive wave rushes forward, breaks, and rolls back; but the great flood is steadily coming up.

Similes are used with a peculiar purpose by poets. Sometimes a poet will rest from his subject to develop a simile, making a beautiful picture. That can only be done in a long poem, and its purpose is to freshen the reader by variety. Such similes are called epic similes. Here is an example from *Sohrab and Rustum*:

But as a troop of pedlars, from Cabool,  
Cross underneath the Indian Caucasus,  
That vast sky-neighbouring mountain of milk snow;  
Winding so high, that, as they mount, they pass  
Long flocks of travelling birds dead on the snow,  
Chok'd by the air, and scarce can they themselves  
Slake their parch'd throats with sugar'd mulberries—  
In single file they move, and stop their breath,  
For fear they should dislodge the o'erhanging snows—  
So the pale Persians held their breath with fear.

(160-9)

This picture is in striking contrast to the heated

plain which is the setting for the story, and after it the reader returns refreshed to the story.

Closely related to the metaphor and simile are other figures of speech which the ordinary reader should understand.

PERSONIFICATION is a figure of speech in which an inanimate object is likened to or spoken of as a person. It can partake then of the nature of either of the previous figures. It is very common but can still be powerful.

SYNECDOCHE is a figure in which an essential part stands for the whole; or, technically, in which a species is made to stand for a genus. 'The bread of life' for the necessities of life; 'a force of fifty rifles' for fifty soldiers carrying rifles; 'all hands on deck' for all sailors on deck. The figure operates by seizing the active part of the object, and indicating the whole by naming that part only.

In METONYMY the object is indicated by naming something accompanying it, so that a concrete adjunct is made to stand for the abstract idea. The *throne* or *crown* stands for the idea of kingship; the *sceptre* for the king's authority; *red tape* for the routine of office; the *bench* for the judges.

There are many more figures of speech, but these are the most important. The idea which must be grasped about these figures is that they are not ornaments but necessities of speech. They are used for exactly the same purpose as words; to make meaning clear, to make it forcible and sometimes to heighten an effect or rouse an emotion. Like words, they must be used sparingly and carefully.

Almost as often as we use language we fall into figurative speech; almost as often as we read, we find figures of speech used. It will improve our expression and add to the pleasure and usefulness of our reading if we realize whenever a Figure is used.

### *Irony*

Irony is a figure of speech but it can be something more. For that reason it is given separate treatment here. The dictionary definition of Irony is: 'A figure of speech in which the intended meaning is the opposite of that expressed by the words used; usually taking the form of sarcasm or ridicule in which laudatory expressions are used to imply condemnation or contempt.'<sup>1</sup> For example, Macaulay says: 'A drayman, in a passion, calls out "You are a pretty fellow," without suspecting that he is uttering irony.' This kind of irony is properly a figure of speech; its figurativeness being that the intended meaning of the words is different from the meaning expressed. The drayman means the opposite of pretty. In the following sentence by Gibbon, the word 'duties' has a fine ironic quality: 'At length, in a silent night, they ascended the most accessible tower, which was guarded only by some monks, oppressed, after the duties of a festival, with sleep and wine.' It can scarcely be part of the duties of monks at religious festivals to drink too much wine, or of guards to sleep.

Irony can be more than a figure of speech. It can be as pervasive as a perfume in an author's

<sup>1</sup> *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary.*

attitude to a subject, or it may be his habitual attitude to life and therefore to any subject he deals with. For example, a great part of the pleasure in reading the novels of Fielding or Jane Austen comes from their delicious irony, which is like a flavour in their work. It is difficult to offer a sufficiently brief example; but this one from Fielding is typical of the addition irony offers to the pleasures of the narrative. Joseph Andrews is found robbed and naked in a ditch. The rich people travelling in the coach will not offer him a single garment between them.

... it is more than probable, poor Joseph must have perished, unless the postillion (a lad who hath since been transported for robbing a henroost) had voluntarily stript off a greatcoat, his only garment.

What an ironic aside that is on society!

Of the kind of irony that is a pervasive atmosphere adopted by an author as suitable to his subject, here is an example that is full of gusto:

I wish to propose for the reader's favourable consideration a doctrine which may, I fear, appear wildly paradoxical and subversive. The doctrine in question is this: that it is undesirable to believe a proposition when there is no ground whatever for supposing it true. I must, of course, admit that if such an opinion became common it would completely transform our social life and our political system; since both are at present faultless, this must weigh against it. I am also aware (what is more serious) that it would tend to diminish the incomes of the clairvoyants, bookmakers, bishops and others who live on the irrational hopes of those who have done nothing to deserve good fortune here or hereafter. In spite of these grave arguments, I maintain that a

case can be made out for my paradox, and I shall try to set it forth.<sup>1</sup>

Here the irony is not pleasant; it is a powerful weapon used against humbug. With the novelist, preoccupied with narrative, irony is a superadded pleasure, a piquancy in the story, and nothing more.

There is a third kind of irony—the irony of *situation*. This is an ironic element in the story itself. Milton's play, *Samson Agonistes*, offers us a superb example of its use. When Samson leaves the stage, every reader knows he is going to his death, but for many lines of glorious poetry his father and his friends talk of a peaceful and honoured old age for him. They do not know what is happening and their pathetic ignorance becomes ironic when they dream of a delightful future for the hero, who, as every reader knows, has gone to die. This type of irony is intensely dramatic. It depends upon ignorance in the characters of something known to the audience.

There is still another type of irony in which affected ignorance plays a part. A wise man in debate pretends ignorance of a matter he really knows all about, and leads the ignorant on to express their unformed views and seems to praise them. Then gradually by his skilful questioning he makes them admit their own ignorance. This was the favourite and very irritating method of Socrates, and is usually called Socratic Irony.

In all these ways Irony is a powerful weapon for intellectual and emotional attack.

<sup>1</sup> BERTRAND RUSSELL, *Sceptical Essays* (Allen & Unwin).

*Economy in Words*

‘A man who writes, at the top of his powers, from a full mind, is always longing to be shorter than he is,’ said C. E. Montague. Abundance of words commonly weakens a sentence and an argument. The fewer the words, the more lively they become. Stevenson, speaking of words and thought, said: ‘Pattern and argument live in each other, and it is by the brevity, clearness, charm, or emphasis of the second, that we judge the strength and fitness of the first.’ Brevity is mentioned first. Again, at the end of the preface to *The Master of Ballantrae*, he says: ‘I believe there is nothing so noble as baldness, and I am sure there is nothing so interesting. I would have all literature bald.’

When writing, always remember Pope’s couplet:

Words are the leaves; and where they most abound,  
Much fruit of sense beneath is rarely found.

Economy is the watchword for composition today. The student in his essays should always cut out most of his adjectives and adverbs, just as he can usually remove his first paragraph with profit to his theme.

There is, on the other hand, a false economy in words. There is the danger of missing out ideas necessary to the complete logical development of an argument or the complete presentation of a picture. It may be that the writer’s mind is full of the subject, and he neglects to detach himself and put himself in the reader’s place. The ideas are in his mind, but they are not transferred completely in his words. Again, the subject may

call for a luxuriance in words. Here is a sentence from the seventeenth century in which the full magnificence of glory descends upon a man's spirit, and a word less would break the movement of it and ruin the emotional expression:

I have been told that if a man that was born blind, could obtain to have his sight for but only one hour during his whole life, and should, at the first opening of his eyes, fix his sight upon the sun when it was at its full glory, either at the rising or the setting of it, he would be so transported and amazed, and so admire the glory of it, that he would not willingly turn his eyes from that first ravishing object, to behold all the other various beauties this world could present to him.<sup>1</sup>

Its wonderful beauty of sound itself expresses the transports and amazement of the blind man. This is different from the common danger of weakening what is written with superfluous adjectives and dead, unnecessary phrases.

Brevity is of the essence in modern prose. Kipling in his *Autobiography* puts it with his familiar clearness, while speaking of some of his short stories: 'They were originally much longer than when they appeared, but the shortening of them, first to my own fancy after rapturous re-readings, and next to the space available, taught me that a tale from which the pieces have been raked out is like a fire that has been poked. One does not know that the operation has been performed, but everyone feels the effect.' What he says of stories, we may apply to all kinds of prose.

Clearness and vividness normally depend upon

<sup>1</sup> IZAAK WALTON.

a wise economy of words. There is abroad in the world today an urgency for reform of all kinds which is reflected in all departments of writing. Never, men feel, was there greater need for clearness and vividness in what is said and written. Therefore this economy in words is everywhere practised.

### *Word Order*

As the unit of speech in English is the phrase and not the word, the order of words is always important. To put it in grammarian's language: in uninflected languages word order is essential to the meaning. Three considerations control word order: meaning, emphasis and sound.<sup>1</sup> Clearness and exactness of meaning is the first consideration. The desire to stress or emphasize an idea may suggest a difference in the word order. Let us examine each in turn.

Meaning in an uninflected language must be the first consideration. To take the simplest kind of example; the improbable statement 'The dog killed the panther' is quite different from 'The panther killed the dog'. The position of clauses also alters the meaning. 'John and James, who is blind, go out together' is different from 'John, who is blind, and James go out together.' The rule then for phrases and for words is: Keep all qualifying words and phrases in positions where they must be related to the words they are meant to qualify and to no others. This is called the rule of proximity.

<sup>1</sup> The interrogative inversion is neglected here as a point of syntax.

The desire to be emphatic may sometimes override this rule. Beginning and end are the emphatic places in the sentence. If a word, which would not be there in the normal word order, is placed at the beginning or end of a sentence, it gains in emphasis. Carlyle was very fond of this trick:

Sharp turns there are, where it will behove you to mind your paces.

Bacon offers us an example of word order used as a device to force the reader back to re-read his phrases in an entirely new light:

A crowd is not company, and faces are but a gallery of pictures, and talk but a tinkling cymbal.

That is excellent commonplace; but when Bacon writes:

A crowd is not company, and faces are but a gallery of pictures, and talk but a tinkling cymbal, where there is no love.

the whole conception changes, the explanation of the three sad facts is apparent with strange emphasis, and the importance of the quality 'love' is stressed, simply by the arrangement of the clauses.

The third rule is satisfaction of sound. This cannot be separated from meaning. Words are always sounds whether we speak them in our heads or aloud, and if they jangle, we do not easily catch their meaning. Phrases and paragraphs must be pleasant in sound to be readily understood. The instinct which drives writers to write beautifully is a fine instinct, for beautiful writing is clear and powerful writing.

The reader must never be wearied by hard

sounds and rough cadences. Prose as much as verse, Montague tells us, 'is an affair of stresses and spacings-out, of the marshalling of more and of less strongly accented syllables into an order which somehow brings beauty to pass'. Of a good sentence he says: 'the words have been picked, sifted clean and put into tune'. That is a phrase to treasure against every time we put pen to paper.

## CHAPTER III

### THE SENTENCE

By the word 'sentence' is usually meant such a portion of a composition as extends from one full stop to the next. The distance between these stops depends upon the subject and the audience. Thus, the sentences in a newspaper leader are usually short as they are intended for simple readers. Long sentences are more appropriate to an involved subject and a sophisticated audience. But whatever its length, the universal rules for the sentence are: it must be clear; it must sound well.

The simplest type of sentence consists of a single clause. This is inadequate for the purposes of civilized intercourse, as we usually wish to modify or add to the simple idea. So upon the main clause other clauses grow, subordinate to the idea of the main clause. There are three ways of building these subordinate clauses upon the principal clause. They may be added to it loosely, one after the other. Secondly, they may all be carried inside the main clause, between its subject and predicate. Thirdly, they may be written on a balanced pattern of sound, the meaning being balanced with the sound and gaining emphasis thereby. The first is the almost universal modern fashion; and for our writing we need only discuss that. As readers we must discuss them all.

For an example of the first type, here are two sentences from *Robinson Crusoe*, which is supposed to be written by a simple seaman. They are about a shipful of sailors who had suffered severely in a storm:

But that which was worst of all was, that they were almost starved for want of provisions, besides the fatigues they had undergone; their bread and flesh were quite gone, they had not one ounce left in the ship, and had had none for eleven days. The only relief they had was, their water was not all spent, and they had about half a barrel of flour left; they had sugar enough; some sweetmeats, they had at first, but they were devoured; and they had seven casks of rum.

There is nothing difficult or laborious about the building of these sentences. The main fact comes at the beginning: 'they were almost starved' and the rest follows: no bread, no flesh, but some water and flour, and so on. The second sentence is a very good example of the kind, for the clauses accumulate on top of one another in the most natural way. It might easily stop at 'spent,' 'left,' or 'devoured'. It is an accumulation of clauses by simple addition and without special shape. This kind is known as the 'loose' sentence. Its nature is to be continuous and cumulative.

The second is called the Period, the most sophisticated of the three. Its principle is to delay completion of the meaning till the end. This involves distinct mental ability in the audience or reader. The verb, which is the active principle in the sentence, is held up. All the subsidiary ideas in their clauses are tucked neatly in, and then the main verb comes to make the whole sentence clear.

This modelling of the period into a single entity gives a definite intellectual satisfaction. A great orator can use it to give polish and brilliance to his utterance. He keeps the audience in suspense by giving it point after point in clause after clause, and only when the verb comes at the end to lock in all the clauses do they become clear in their relationship to one another and to the main idea. This type is difficult and is now out of fashion. There is an artificiality about it which the urgency of modern expression does not like. But because of its weight and dignity, its beautiful completeness and the suspense it carries in its nature, it is still occasionally used. Here is an example from Burke:

When at length Hyder Ali found that he had to do with men who either would sign no convention, or whom no treaty and no signature would bind, and who were the determined enemies of human intercourse itself, he decreed to make the country possessed by these incorrigible and predestined criminals a memorable example to mankind.

‘He decreed’ locks up the clauses, and what he decreed makes an emphatic close to a gloriously sonorous period.

The third type of sentence also gives its special pleasure to the mind and senses. It involves a balance of the clauses both in sense and sound. Once the ear catches the effect of balance it grows to expect it. So the method arouses expectation and gives the satisfaction of expectation realized. This balance is called antithesis, and a style which employs it an antithetic style. Dr Johnson was a master in this manner:

The notice which you have been pleased to take of my labours, had it been early, had been kind; but it has been delayed till I am indifferent, and cannot enjoy it; till I am solitary, and cannot impart it; till I am known, and do not want it.

There is the sensation of a gesture of one hand and then of the other in these pairs of clauses. Here is a simpler example, more of the sense than of the sound:

If a man receives a wrong that no law can remedy, yet let him see that his resentment be such that no law can punish.

The effects obtained by the use of these different kinds of sentences will now be examined with further examples. Sentence arrangement, like word and phrase arrangement, must largely be governed by sound effects. The sound must be pleasing and to please it must have variety. Short sentences must be carefully varied or they produce monotony, which leads to fatigue. Here are examples of series of short sentences used with particular force. The first is from the opening paragraph of Mr Wells' *Autobiography*. The brief sentences reflect the distress the writer wishes to confess to:

I need freedom of mind. I want peace for work.  
I am distressed by immediate circumstance.

But the writer, except in drama, dare not keep to this length. The next sentence is longer and beautifully balanced:

My thoughts and work are encumbered by claims and vexations and I cannot see any hope of release from them; and hope of a period of serene and beneficent activity, before I am overtaken altogether by infirmity and death.

Vexation and weariness are still the mood of the writer, but the mood is now expressed in a more developed harmony of sound, which is closed by the deliberate substantives 'infirmity', 'death'.

The next passage is from the speeches of Woodrow Wilson. He is speaking after the War, when idealists like himself could speak of the future of mankind hopefully:

The stage is set, the destiny disclosed. It has come about by no plan of our conceiving, but by the hand of God who led us into the way. We cannot turn back. We can only go forward, with lifted eyes and freshened spirit, to follow the vision. It was of this that we dreamed at our birth. America shall in truth show the way. The light streams upon the path ahead and nowhere else.

The brief sentences give to the prose that quietness which is more impressive than any loud appeal.

The next example is from the drama. Dramatic prose is conventionalized conversation; and the great masters of it in English are Shakespeare, Congreve and Oscar Wilde. In this example from Wilde, the sentences are so neat that they sparkle. They are spoken easily and have that crisp energy which is necessary to carry along dialogue on the stage:

*Lady Markly.*—Oh! I have brought a much more charming person than Sir John. Sir John's temper since he has taken seriously to politics has become quite unbearable. Really, now that the House of Commons is trying to become useful, it does a great deal of harm.

*Sir Robert Chiltern.*—I hope not, Lady Markly. At any rate we do our best to waste the public time, don't we? But who is this charming person you have been kind enough to bring to us?

*Lady Markly*.—Her name is Mrs Cheveley! One of the Dorsetshire Cheveley's, I suppose. But I really don't know. Families are so mixed nowadays. Indeed, as a rule, everybody turns out to be somebody else.<sup>1</sup>

Notice the difference in the sentence movement between the two speakers. The man is quiet and urbane, his speech uniform and balanced. The woman's sentences are bright, and just too emphatic. She is trying to draw attention to herself. So the character is shown by the shape of the sentences put into its mouth.

But a very different result can be obtained from a series of short sentences. These famous sentences from Bacon's essay *Of Studies* are as weighty in movement as in meaning:

Crafty men condemn them, simple men admire them, and wise men use them.

For they teach not their own use, but that is a wisdom without them, and above them, won by observation.

Read not to contradict, nor to be believed, but to weigh and consider.<sup>2</sup>

These pithy sentences are an appeal to the reason. Every one is pregnant with thought, and requires close attention and consideration.

Here are the opening sentences of the Authorized Translation of the Bible, published one year before the last quotation. They are among the noblest expressions of the imagination in English, and have a wonderful emotional appeal. Magnificence is usually attained by long, elaborately

<sup>1</sup> *An Ideal Husband* (Methuen).

<sup>2</sup> From the 1612 edition, when Bacon was fifty-two and at the height of his powers.

constructed sentences, but nothing in English literature is more magnificent than this:

In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, Let there be light: and there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good; and God divided the light from the darkness. And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night.

And the evening and the morning were the first day.

A kind of glory rises and accumulates from these 'ands' as if they implied 'and another wonderful thing'. Every one rings a higher note of excitement until the dying of the first day.

The next example comes from the same source. It is a religious song; the 23rd Psalm. Read it aloud, and you will appreciate the unruffled smoothness of the language as one easy sentence follows another and then a lift of exaltation is produced in the last, longer sentence by the cumulation of simple phrase on phrase. There is a serenity here that a writer would be hard put to it to attain in the more highly-wrought types of sentences:

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures; he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul; he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me.

The next example, written a hundred and fifty years later, offers prose with a simple, tender quality in it obtained by the use of short sentences.

It is from Goldsmith, one of the greatest masters of the quiet, easy manner in English.

However, we loved each other tenderly, and our fondness increased as we grew old. There was, in fact, nothing that could make us angry with the world or each other. We had an elegant house, situated in a fine country and a good neighbourhood. The year was spent in moral or rural amusement, in visiting our rich neighbours, and relieving such as were poor. We had no revolutions to fear, nor fatigues to undergo; all our adventures were by the fireside, and all our migrations from the blue bed to the brown.<sup>1</sup>

The character of the Vicar is in these sentences; his simplicity, his unpretentiousness, his kindness and his quiet dignity.

Contrast these last quotations with this example of sparkling paradox; very different in its effect, but equally dependent for it upon the use of the short sentence:

Players are 'the abstract and brief chronicles of the time'; the motley representatives of human nature. They are the only honest hypocrites. Their life is a voluntary dream; a studied madness. The height of their ambition is to be *beside themselves*. Today, kings, tomorrow, beggars, it is only when they are themselves, that they are nothing. Made up of mimic laughter and tears, passing from the extremes of joy and woe at the prompter's call, they wear the livery of other men's fortunes; their very thoughts are not their own. They are, as it were, train-bearers in the pageant of life, and hold a glass up to humanity, fraailer than itself.<sup>2</sup>

How can hypocrites be honest? dreams voluntary? madness studied? their very thoughts not their own? These are brilliant paradoxes, crowded

<sup>1</sup> *The Vicar of Wakefield*.

<sup>2</sup> HAZLITT, *On Actors and Acting*, 1.

upon one another in these crisp sentences which give us a vivid idea of what kind of men actors are.

It must now be evident that the range of effect to be obtained from the short sentence is very great. The effect depends not merely upon the turn of the individual sentence, but the balancing of one sentence against the other in series. It is a question of sound. No two must have the same sound pattern; that is the rule of prose. Here are the briefest sentences we have quoted, printed out so that we can contrast their shapes:

In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.

And the earth was without form and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep.

And the spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.

And God said, Let there be light: and there was light.

And God saw the light, that it was good; and God divided the light from the darkness.

And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night.

And the evening and the morning were the first day.

This is the simplicity of a great artist. The movement of every sentence is different, but the brevity of each assists the effect of stark magnificence. Twice, closely associated ideas are divided only by a semi-colon. And the most sublime statement of all—‘and there was light’—follows a colon, implying that to the divinity creation was utterly easy. A full stop would have been too long a pause to give the effect of the command being obeyed at once, and with a

shorter pause the dramatic effect would lose emphasis. In prose all these details must be considered; the artist has carefully considered them all, and the reader will lose the essence of the enjoyment of great literature if he neglects them. Read the quotations in this chapter again, and see how each artist has carefully varied the length and sound pattern of his sentences.

By the nature of modern English life the short sentence, occasionally varied by longer sentences of loosely strung clauses, is almost universally used. For now the speed of life demands that everything should be stated so that it can be grasped easily and quickly. There is a further reason to which writers are referring more and more—English civilization is radically changing. It has broken away from most of its traditional beliefs. Nor has any new belief taken the place of the old. Accepted standards of right and wrong, long unquestioned, are coming into disrepute. The prevailing systems of economics are disastrous. Serious people all over Europe fear the extinction of their civilization by war. This fear has bred an urgent desire for truth—truth which will save civilization. This has had its effect upon prose. There is no time for artificiality or ornament. Plain, perspicuous prose is imperative for the propagation of truth and reasonableness so that sanity may prevail.

Here is an example of modern English intellectual prose:

Democracy, as a theory, has not the hold on men's minds that it had before the war. It has become evident that, in an industrial society, there are key positions of power, which, if not in the hands of

private plutocrats, will be held by officials, who may, remotely, be subject to popular control, but will, in many respects, be able to take important decisions on their own initiative. We thus arrive at bureaucracy as the practical alternative to aristocracy and plutocracy. If everything possible is done to eliminate unjust privilege, power will still be unevenly distributed, because this is unavoidable, but it will be given to those most fitted to exercise it. It will not, however, be irresponsible power such as belongs to plutocrats and absolute monarchs; it will be power subject to ultimate control by the democracy. Men who are to exercise this sort of power wisely require qualities somewhat different from those produced by either democratic or aristocratic education. The undemocratic element consists in their being avowedly above the average in capacity and knowledge. The unaristocratic element consists in the fact that their position depends, not upon the social status of their fathers, but upon their personal abilities. And since they do not have ultimate and absolute power, they do not need exceptional aptitude for command, but only unusual powers of arriving at sound conclusions, and giving reasons for their conclusions to persons somewhat inferior to themselves in brains.<sup>1</sup>

This passage exemplifies the ideal of modern prose; sound thinking in the fewest words. It is worth looking at closely. There are nine sentences. The first is simple. The second is loose, the subordinate clauses modify as necessity arises and the sense continues without any effort being called for from the reader. The third is simple. The fourth is again a straightforward accumulation: 'If . . . (then) . . . because . . . but.' The fifth, middle sentence, has balance and antithesis in it. The sixth is simple. So is the seventh.

<sup>1</sup> BERTRAND RUSSELL, *Education and the Social Order* (Allen & Unwin).

The eighth is perfectly straightforward with its 'not . . . but' alternative. The ninth is logically as straightforward, but there is in it just that rising and rounding off in the sound sequence which is pleasant at the conclusion of a paragraph. Prose like this is an efficient vehicle for ideas, and is capable of conveying any argument.

Here is a very adequate description of such prose masters, written in prose that is itself a model:

His highest merit is that he is simple and vigorous. He writes like a man who has fully considered his subject and knows exactly what he wants to say. He writes without the least endeavour to be fine. He is too much engrossed with the task of communicating his thoughts to be desirous of calling attention to his eloquence. Thus, if he has no literary graces, he has no literary affectation. By dint of devotion to his subject he comes to have a style, not a great or a beautiful style, but a style eminently characteristic of the man, adequate to his ideas and stimulating to the earnest reader.<sup>1</sup>

Such writers are the hope of civilization.

Turning to the prose of narrative and description, here is a superb example of the modern manner. It describes the dust and ashes of a distant volcanic eruption being blown across a town:

All was silent. No footfall could be heard in the streets; the powdery ashes, softer than snow, absorbed every sound. And still they fell. Those few scared natives whom necessity forced to go abroad crept about in fear of their lives. They thought the end of the world had come. Terror-stricken, they carried

<sup>1</sup> F. C. MONTAGUE 'On Bentham', Craik's *English Prose Selections* (Macmillan), vol. 3.

knives and revolvers in their pockets; they passed each other distrustfully in the streets holding, in one hand, a lighted torch or lantern, and in the other a handkerchief pressed to the face for fear of suffocation. In one or two of the shop windows could be discerned a light glimmering feebly as though through the thickest fog. All the ordinary sights and sounds of morning—vehicles plying for hire, the cracking of whips, the cries of the fish and fruit vendors—all were gone. The deathly stillness was broken only by the clangour of the town clock, tolling the hours into a darkened world.<sup>1</sup>

These beautifully modulated phrases and sentences recall Stevenson's remark on phrases in his *Art of Writing*; that 'each phrase is to be comely in itself'. It is equally true that each sentence depends for its structure upon the sentence next it. The first and third sentences are separated by a much longer one. The sixth and eighth are the longest, and between them is a much shorter, simple sentence. The end of the paragraph depends not upon the organization of clauses raising the movement, but upon the long vowel sounds lengthening the last clause—'tolling the hours into a *darkened world*'. These long, round vowels are also in emphatic contrast to the creaking, crackling vowels of the previous sentence, which picture the sounds of a normal day as against the dullness of this ashen world.

The sensuous ideal in modern prose then is harmonious variety between the sentences. Another quotation from Stevenson's essay will lead us to the contrasting ideal of older English prose. 'Between the implication and the evolution

<sup>1</sup> NORMAN DOUGLAS, *South Wind* (Dent).

of the sentence there should be a satisfying equipoise of sound; for nothing more often disappoints the ear than a sentence solemnly or sonorously prepared, and hastily or weakly finished. Nor should the balance be too striking or exact, for the rule is to be infinitely various.'

Now in modern prose the sentence is commonly so brief that the satisfaction derived from the balance of sound cannot be sustained. But the passage admirably expresses the ideal of earlier centuries; and the first example is from Milton in the seventeenth century:

I cannot praise a fugitive and cloistered virtue unexercised and unbreathed, that never sallies out and seeks her adversary, but slinks out of the race, where that immortal garland is to be run for, not without dust and heat.

That surely is 'solemnly and sonorously prepared' and there is neither haste nor weakness in the ending of it. Look how the 's' sounds accumulate in the middle: sallies, seeks, slinks; until at last there is almost a hiss of contempt. How adroitly the words are ordered to give each the appropriate emphasis. Above all, how beautifully the sentence is modulated.

This sentence from Johnson, written a hundred years later, also fulfils Stevenson's ideal:

Shakespeare's plays are not in the rigorous and critical sense either tragedies or comedies, but compositions of a distinct kind; exhibiting the real state of sublunary nature, which partakes of good and evil, joy and sorrow, mingled with endless variety of proportion and innumerable modes of combination; and expressing the course of the world, in which the loss of one is the gain of another; in which, at the same

time, the reveller is hastening to his wine, and the mourner burying his friend; in which the malignity of one is sometimes defeated by the frolic of another; and many mischiefs and many benefits are done and hindered without design.

A sentence like this is the equivalent of the modern paragraph. The subject is stated—‘neither tragedies nor comedies, but a distinct kind’; then elaborated—‘the reveller is hastening to his wine, and the mourner burying his friend’; and the height and the end of the argument in one, the hopelessness of finding order in earthly life—‘many mischiefs and many benefits are done and hindered without design’.

The craftsmanship of the sentence is superb. There is no halting nor breaking midway, and the weighty syllables at the end are arranged to give a full and solemn close. It is magnificent but it is not the modern way.

Modern prose has given up these triumphs. Some writers of the last century attempted them, and their success was so doubtful that the attempt is now avoided. There is a pretentiousness about their efforts that takes away any pleasure the brilliance of the effect may offer. Here, for example, is a very cleverly constructed sentence by Ruskin, who could write, when he chose, as sound, simple prose as anyone in the century. This sentence is so pretentious that it becomes Rhetoric in the bad sense—hollow talk, cleverness that repels. He is writing of the old tower of a church on the French shore, overlooking the English Channel:

The large neglect, the noble unsightliness of it; the record of its years written so visibly, yet without

sign of the weakness or decay; its stern wasteness and gloom, eaten away by the Channel winds, and overgrown with the bitter sea grasses; its slates and tiles all shaken and rent, and not falling; its desert of brickwork full of bolts, and holes, and ugly fissures, and yet strong, like a bare brown rock; its carelessness of what any one thinks or feels about it, putting forth no claim, having no claim, having no beauty or desirableness, pride, nor grace; yet neither asking for pity; not, as ruins are, useless and piteous, feebly or fondly garrulous of better days; but useful still, going through its own daily work—as some old fisherman beaten grey by storm, yet drawing his daily nets: so it stands, with no complaint about its past youth, in blanched and meagre massiveness and serviceableness, gathering human souls together underneath it; the sound of its bells for prayer still rolling through its rents; and the grey peak of it seen far across the sea, principal of the three that rise above the waste of surfy sand and hillocked shore,—the lighthouse for life, and the belfry for labour, and this for patience and praise.<sup>1</sup>

All the tricks are there, variety of phrase, short ones accumulating, then being varied by a longer one, then shorter ones and a long one again and the final weight which will balance the close. But in 1856 such prose is becoming unnatural. Four years earlier, Newman wrote the sentences which are quoted next; and these sentences bring us back from our digression to the modern ideal of short sentences.

Hence it is that it is almost a definition of a gentleman to say that he is one who never inflicts pain. This description is both refined and, as far as it goes, accurate. He is mainly occupied in merely removing the obstacles which hinder the free and unembarrassed

<sup>1</sup> *Modern Painters.*

action of those about him; and concurs with their movements rather than takes the initiative himself. His benefits may be considered as parallel to what are called comforts or conveniences in arrangements of a personal nature: like an easy chair or a good fire, which do their part in dispelling cold and fatigue, though nature provides both means of rest and animal heat without them. The true gentleman in like manner carefully avoids whatever may cause a jar or a jolt in the minds of those with whom he is cast;—all clashing of opinion, or collision of feeling, all restraint, or suspicion, or gloom, or resentment; his great concern being to make everyone at their ease and at home. He has his eyes on all his company; he is tender towards the bashful, gentle towards the distant, and merciful towards the absurd; he can recollect to whom he is speaking; he guards allusions, or topics which may irritate; he is seldom prominent in conversation, and never wearisome. He makes light of favours while he does them, and seems to be receiving when he is conferring. He never speaks of himself except when compelled, never defends himself by a mere retort, he has no ears for slander and gossip, is scrupulous in imputing motives to those who interfere with him, and interprets everything for the best.<sup>1</sup>

This is English prose of the very first order. Yet it would never be mistaken for contemporary prose; it is too restrained in its modelling, too polished. Modern prose is much nearer spontaneous talk than this. But its polished restraint will repay analysis.

The first sentence has an unbroken movement, very quiet. The second has a double emphasis, falling successively on the important words 'refined', 'accurate'. The third has a longer movement,

<sup>1</sup> *The Idea of a University Defined.*

rising and falling twice, and is balanced on the semi-colon. It reminds us of Stevenson's remark: 'the sentence turns upon a pivot, neatly balanced'. The fourth is much more elaborate. The stress again falls on the important words 'comforts', 'conveniences' and this time the stress is further marked by alliteration, a very old and common trick in English. The main balance is about the colon, but the succeeding phrases are themselves carefully varied. This reminds us of Stevenson's dictum that successive phrases 'must differ openly in length and rhythm'. The fifth is rather like the fourth. Stress and alliteration are used again, 'jar', 'jolt'; and the succeeding phrases are short and varied. It differs in having a second pause, longer than the first; so that after it sufficient attention will be given to the very important idea —'his greatest concern being to make everyone at their ease and at home'. The sixth sentence is elaborated into five quite distinct parts. The subject is stated in the first part and elaborated in the three balanced clauses in the second part. The third part pivots the whole by its brevity and recovers speed. The fourth returns to the balanced pattern of the familiar 'one thing or the other' type; and the last has the length and weight necessary for concluding so elaborate a sentence. There is nothing hasty or weak in the finishing of it. The seventh, as would be expected after three elaborate sound movements, is a simple, balanced cadence of two clauses. The eighth is a fine example of accumulation, the movement speeding and rising, clause upon clause, until the turn comes on the expression of the fine generosity in the final

idea—‘and interprets everything for the best’. The sentence closes on the strong beat on the word ‘best’.

An outstanding characteristic of the whole passage is its urbanity. Gracefully slow, it has the quietness and lack of over-emphasis of civilized expression.

The final example of the loose sentence is a modern one. It is in fact in the most modern manner that has proved successful. It is by the greatest master of description in a generation of English writers that is now growing old. The peculiarity of the passage is its verblessness. So modern a method cannot be recommended as a model for composition, but this vivid, verbless description of a morning in Florence offers a standard of enjoyment.

And then, when he went out, he found the Piazza della Signoria packed with men: but all, all men. And all farmers, landowners and land-workers. The curious, fine-nosed Tuscan farmers, with their half-sardonic, amber-coloured eyes. Their curious individuality, their clothes worn so easy and reckless, their hats with the personal twist. Their curious full oval cheeks, their tendency to be too fat, to have a belly and heavy limbs. Their close-sitting dark hair. And above all, their sharp, almost acrid, mocking expression, the silent curl of the nose, the eternal challenge, the rock-bottom unbelief, and the subtle fearlessness. The dangerous, subtle, never-dying fearlessness, and the acrid unbelief. But men! Men! A town of men, in spite of everything. The one manly quality, undying, acrid fearlessness. The one eternal challenge of the unquenched human soul. Perhaps too acrid and challenging today, when there is nothing left to challenge. But men—who existed without apology and without justification. Men who would neither

justify themselves nor apologize for themselves. Just men. The rarest thing left in our sweet Christendom.<sup>1</sup>

Probably the first thing that strikes the reader is the repetition of words; so that they grow fuller with meaning. The writer chooses an epithet delicately, and repeats it to show how right it is. Or he finds a substantive so right that he changes the epithets before it and it gains in propriety. 'Fearlessness' carries four epithets in succession. In the same way the epithets are so right they fit any of the substantives. And all through there is the word 'men' repeated and repeated; the recurring theme. The verblessness assists this stressing of the substantives and epithets; for the verb is usually the most vital word in the sentence. When it is gone, the other words gain force when they are managed with the skill which D. H. Lawrence brings to the making of prose.

### *The Period*

The period, as suggested before, is really a device used by orators to keep the audience in excited suspense during the evolution of the sentence. Nothing is clear till the main verb comes, and it only comes to close the sentence. The excited suspense assures the orator of careful attention. The device was transferred to prose and was greatly used in the eighteenth century, but since then has gradually fallen out of favour. Competently used, its effect is fine, and at its best, very distinguished. But it is a difficult type and easily deteriorates into a mannerism which be-

<sup>1</sup> D. H. LAWRENCE, *Aaron's Rod* (Heinemann).

comes painfully artificial. For the student today who wishes to write English, the study of the period is unnecessary; for the student who wishes to read English prose, the period offers a pleasure which should be appreciated. Here is an admirably sustained example:

When they viewed with complacency the extent of their own mental prowess; when they exercised the various faculties of memory, of fancy and of judgement, in the most profound speculations or the most important labours; and when they reflected on the desire of fame, which transported them into future ages, far beyond the bounds of death and of the grave; they were unwilling to confound themselves with the beasts of the field, or to suppose that a being for whose dignity they entertained the most sincere admiration, could be limited to a spot of earth, and to a few years of duration.<sup>1</sup>

The interest is well sustained by 'when . . . when . . . and when', balanced at length by the answering 'then it follows' understood.

Another way of achieving a period is by the use of participial clauses accumulated before the predicate:

Having terminated his disputes with every enemy, and every rival, who buried their mutual animosities in their common detestation against the creditors of the Nabob of Arcot, he drew from every quarter whatever a savage ferocity could add to his new rudiments in the art of destruction; and compounding all the materials of fury, havoc and desolation, into one black cloud, he hung for a while on the declivities of the mountains.<sup>2</sup>

This sentence is a double period. In each the predicate is preceded by its participial clauses, and

<sup>1</sup> GIBBON.

<sup>2</sup> BURKE.

the meaning is thereby delayed, the completion of the sense postponed and the interest and attention held until the end.

In another type a catalogue of subjects is accumulated. The mind seeks to retain them all and, when the predicate comes, to understand how these subjects are related:

To be bred in a place of estimation; to see nothing low and sordid from one's infancy; to be taught to respect one's self; to be habituated to the censorial inspection of the public eye; to look early to public opinion; to stand upon such elevated ground as to be enabled to take a large view of the widespread and infinitely diversified combinations of men and affairs in a large society; to have leisure to read, to reflect, to converse; to be enabled to draw the court and attention of the wise and learned wherever they are to be found;—to be habituated in armies to command and to obey; to be taught to despise danger in the pursuit of honour and duty; to be formed to the greatest degree of vigilance, foresight and circumspection, in a state of things in which no fault is committed with impunity, and the slightest mistakes draw on the most ruinous consequences—to be led to a guarded and regulated conduct, from a sense that you are considered as an instructor of your fellow-citizens in their highest concerns, and that you act as a reconciler between God and man—to be employed as an administrator of law and justice, and to be thereby amongst the first benefactors of mankind—to be a professor of high science or of liberal and ingenuous art—to be among rich traders, who from their success are presumed to have sharp and vigorous understandings, and to possess the virtue of diligence, order, constancy, and regularity, and to have cultivated an habitual regard to commutative justice—these are the circumstances of men, that form what I should call a *natural aristocracy*, without which there is no nation.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> BURKE, *Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs.*

Long as this sentence is, it is comparatively easy to follow. If it is read, and not heard, it is easy to turn back and see again what it is that Burke calls a 'natural aristocracy'. In fact, there is in it a certain surprise, which drives the reader back over the catalogue. It is the same effect that is obtained by Bacon in the quotation at the end of the last chapter.

A more difficult form of the period is complicated by the inclusion of clauses not all of the same kind. Dr Johnson opens a periodical essay with this sentence:

Those who exalt themselves into the chair of instruction, without inquiring whether any will submit to their authority, have not sufficiently considered how much of human life passes in little incidents, cursory conversation, slight business, and casual amusements; and therefore they have endeavoured only to inculcate the more awful virtues, without condescending to regard those petty qualities, which grow important only by their frequency, and which, though they produce no single acts of heroism, nor astonish us by great events, yet are every moment exerting their influence upon us, and make the draft of life sweet or bitter by imperceptible instillations.<sup>1</sup>

Here we have the linking of complete clauses, two of which are of the period type. Notice that the language which supports these magnificent periodic structures is heavily Latinized.

### *Antithetic Sentences*

The balancing of clauses in sentences (which is what antithesis means) is a very old device. As it involves a balance of sound as well as of sense,

<sup>1</sup> *Rambler* No. 72.

we may say that the sentence in which this device is used is antiphonic as well as antithetic. The Elizabethans, with their abundant life and gusto, introduced many fashions into verse and prose and among them a painfully artificial way of writing called Euphuism. It acquired this name from the book *Euphues*, the first to be written in the manner. The essence of it was the antithesis of clauses. Here is an example of a period in which the accumulated clauses are balanced in pairs:

For as the Bee that gathereth honey out of the weed, when she espieth the fair flower flyeth to the sweetest: or as the kind spaniel though he hunt after birds, yet forsakes them to retrieve the partridge: or as we commonly feed on beef hungrily at the first, yet seeing the quail more dainty, change our diet: so I, although I loved Philautus for his good properties, yet seeing Euphues to excel him, I ought by nature to like him better.<sup>1</sup>

There are four pairs of balanced antitheses, the last prolonged by a third clause to give the slowness necessary to end the sentence. That was published in 1579, about as far back as we can go for prose in modern English. Since then the pleasing device of antithesis has never been neglected.

In the first place it assists the memory:

Of the western provinces which obeyed the Cæsars,  
Britain was the last that was conquered, and the first  
that was thrown away.

‘last—conquered . . . first—thrown away.’ The sequence sticks in the memory.

In the second place, the ‘one hand’ and ‘the

<sup>1</sup> LYL, *Euphues*.

other' fashion makes for simplification and clearness. Examples naturally come from Dr Johnson, who never touched a subject but he stated his views clearly and completely. Here he is explaining that it is not an affectation that special subjects have their special vocabulary. This is a commonplace to us, but here it is stated with the completeness of a great intellect:

They that content themselves with general ideas may rest in general terms; but those whose studies or employments force them upon a closer inspection, must have names for particular parts, and words by which they may express various modes of combination, such as none but themselves have occasion to consider.

And here again is a typical generalization, one of those sentences weighty with experience, that give us more pleasure than anything else in the writings of this great artist:

Life, however short, is made still shorter by waste of time, and its progress towards happiness, though naturally slow, is yet retarded by unnecessary labour.

It is commonplace, something often thought 'but ne'er so well expressed', but it is commonplace expressed in a beautiful modulation of language. Again, what educationalist or politician, arguing for vernacular instruction, but would be glad to be able to state his case so tersely and finally as here:

Every man is more speedily instructed in his own language than any other; before we search the rest of the world for teachers, let us try whether we may not spare our trouble by finding them at home.

Thirdly, and finally, balancing imparts great energy to the sentence. This quality goes with

the one just mentioned and cannot be better exemplified than from Dr Johnson's famous *Letter to Lord Chesterfield*:

Is not a patron, my lord, one who looks with unconcern on a man struggling for life in the water, and, when he has reached ground, encumbers him with help? The notice which you have been pleased to take of my labours, had it been early, had been kind; but it has been delayed till I am indifferent, and cannot enjoy it; till I am known, and do not want it. I hope it is no very cynical asperity not to confess obligations where no benefit has been received, or to be unwilling that the public should consider me as owing that to a patron, which providence has enabled me to do for myself.

It is a style out of favour now. Writers today prefer a more subtle, though apparently more simple, movement and balance in their sentences. Antithesis arouses expectation and sometimes brings surprise. There is a balance of expectation and satisfaction in the antithetic way which has its pleasure, however out of fashion it may be today.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE PARAGRAPH

It is said that Gibbon, while writing *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, arranged every paragraph in his head before committing a word to paper. He used to pace his study, building those long stately paragraphs until he was satisfied with every word, phrase and sentence and the balance of every sentence with every other. Only then would he take up his pen.

The paragraph is the longest sensuous unit in prose composition. The sense appealed to is still the sense of sound, and much of Gibbon's excited efforts in constructing his paragraphs must have been devoted to getting his sound sequences right till the structure became a harmony. The intellectual appeal of the paragraph is the mental pleasure of seeing a subject stated and adequately worked out. But this intellectual pleasure we get from the longest essay and the longest novel. On the other hand, the sensuous pleasure of sound-harmony beginning and rising, falling and finishing, cannot be sought in any unit longer than the paragraph.

It is a common definition of a paragraph that it is the unit in composition which denotes the full development of a single idea. This is at best vague, as it depends upon the definition of the large term 'idea'; and indeed is probably quite misleading. One idea may be developed in one

sentence or through many paragraphs. The best use we can make of this definition is to change it into a negative one: 'Two distinct ideas should not be developed in the same paragraph.'

For the purposes of the student's own composition this common definition has value. The essay subjects offered to students are chosen so that one idea can be developed after another in a simple way. A few definite ideas suggest themselves in a certain sequence and they are all capable of a certain development. In constructing paragraphs the student is careful to state the subject of the paragraph in the first, usually brief, sentence. He develops the idea, and at the end he is careful to see that the last sentence leads to the idea which is going to be stated in the first sentence of the next paragraph. To the student writing his essays the questions of sound-harmonies and sensuous units scarcely arise.

To the student as reader it is far otherwise. He misses the pleasure of reading English prose if he does not enjoy the sound-harmonies of paragraphs. Not that the sound is ever more important than the sense. The first purpose of prose is always mental or emotional persuasion; but in the happy nature of things that persuasion requires beauty of sound, and produces beauty of sound. As thought comes to the mind, it has shape as an idea and a sound pattern as well. Clear, healthy thinking takes on an agreeable shape and sound pattern. The shape of the idea that grows in the writer's mind makes the shape of the paragraph: indeed, is the paragraph. And the paragraph is a sensuous unit of sound.

It is time to take an example. This is a descriptive passage by D. H. Lawrence, and no writer of the last generation surpassed his genius for description:

Her fingers worked away all the time in a little, half-fretful movement, yet spontaneous as butterflies leaping here and there. She chattered rapidly on in her Italian that I could not understand, looking meanwhile into my face, because the story roused her somewhat. Yet not a feature moved. Her eyes remained candid and open and unconscious as the skies. Only a sharp will in them now and then seemed to gleam at me, as if to dominate me.

Her shuttle had caught in the dead chicory plant, and spun no more. She did not notice. I stooped and broke off the twigs. There was a glint of blue in them yet. Seeing what I was doing, she merely withdrew a few inches from the plant. Her bobbin hung free.

She went on with her tale, looking at me wonderfully. She seemed like the Creation, like the beginning of the world, the first morning. Her eyes were like the first morning of the world, so ageless.

Her thread broke. She seemed to take no notice, but mechanically picked up the shuttle, wound up a length of worsted, connecting the ends from her wool strand, set the bobbin spinning again, and went on talking, in her half-intimate, half-unconscious fashion, as if she were talking to her own world in me.

So she stood in the sunshine on the little platform, old and yet like the morning, erect and solitary, sun-coloured, sun-discoloured, whilst I at her elbow, like a piece of night and moonshine, stood smiling into her eyes, afraid lest she should deny me existence.<sup>1</sup>

These five paragraphs form a complete picture in words. But each is a perfect unit in itself. Each has its own theme which is developed in sound

<sup>1</sup> *Twilight in Italy* (Heinemann).

sequences suitable to its peculiar meaning. Let us analyse it:

*First paragraph.* The theme here is the woman's actions and their effect upon the writer. The two rather long opening sentences formed of simple words express admirably the quietness and immobility of the scene. This feeling is sustained to the end of the paragraph.

*Second paragraph.* A change of style is deliberately introduced. Something has happened. The scene is disturbed, though ever so slightly. The sudden flurry, soon over, is clearly expressed in a series of short, rapid sentences. Then 'Her bobbin hung free'; the interlude is over.

*Third paragraph.* The writer returns to the style of the first paragraph and to the first atmosphere. Longer, easily flowing sentences tell the reader that peace is restored and the mind of the writer free again to react to the woman he is watching.

*Fourth paragraph.* Action again. Another interlude but not so disturbing as the first. The woman's impassivity is beautifully shewn in the straightforward sequence of little actions following quickly one upon the other until at the end the disturbance is over and the scene relaxes again into its original peace.

*Fifth paragraph.* The writer returns to pure description again, and in a single sustained sentence recaptures his mental reaction to the woman and her surroundings.

Of these five paragraphs, then, the first and last three begin with an action of the old woman, and end with the reaction of the writer to what she

does. Each of these four paragraphs has that definite shape. The second one is made of very short sentences, describing a series of trivial actions and little facts that happen to catch his attention. It is a sort of flurry in the calm mood of the other paragraphs. Each paragraph has its unity, for each repeats the process of artistic description, proceeding from something in the subject to the agitation it causes in the writer's spirit. In sentence structure they vary from the series of tiny sentences in the second to the beautifully wrought single sentence forming the last. The passage is a very fine example of the type of description which is a picture in words.

Here is another type of description concerned with telling clearly and quickly a series of events. The author does not come into it at all: he wishes to give an unbiassed description of certain events without comment: as we say, he writes objectively. T. E. Lawrence is describing what Feisal found when he went to Damascus to make a report for his father, the Sherif of Mecca, at the beginning of the War.

Feisal reported in January 1915 that local conditions were good, but that the general war was not going well for their hopes. In Damascus there were three divisions of Arab troops ready for rebellion. In Aleppo two other divisions, riddled with Arab nationalism, were sure to join in if the others began. There was only one Turkish division this side of the Taurus, so that it was certain that the rebels would get possession of Syria at the first effort. On the other hand, public opinion was less ready for extreme measures, and the military class quite sure that Germany would win the war and win it soon. If, however, the Allies landed their Australian Force

(preparing in Egypt) at Alexandretta, and so covered the Syrian flank, then it would be wise and safe to risk a final German victory and the need to make a previous separate peace with the Turks.

Delay followed as the Allies went to the Dardanelles, and not to Alexandretta. Feisal went after them to get first-hand knowledge of Gallipoli conditions, since a breakdown of Turkey would be the Arab signal. Then followed stagnation through the months of the Dardanelles campaign. In that slaughter-house the remaining Ottoman first-line army was destroyed. The disaster to Turkey of the accumulated losses was so great that Feisal came back to Syria, judging it a possible moment in which to strike, but found that meanwhile the local situation had become unfavourable.

His Syrian supporters were under arrest or in hiding, and their friends being hanged in scores on political charges. He found the well-disposed Arab divisions either exiled to distant fronts, or broken up in drafts and distributed among Turkish units. The Arab peasantry were in the grip of Turkish military service, and Syria prostrate before the merciless Jemal Pasha. His assets had disappeared.

He wrote to his father counselling further delay, till England should be ready and Turkey in extremities. Unfortunately, England was in a deplorable condition. Her forces were falling back shattered from the Dardanelles. The slow-drawn agony of Kut was in its last stages; and the Senussi rising, coincident with the entry of Bulgaria, threatened her on new flanks.<sup>1</sup>

The first paragraph is very typically normal. The subject is stated in the first short sentence and developed in what follows. The second paragraph begins with the delay of the Dardanelles, describes the shambles vigorously and ends

<sup>1</sup> *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* (Cape).

with the decision of Feisal consequent upon that delay. The third describes the situation in Syria when he returned. Sharp, incisive, stark. The fourth describes mercilessly the state of England in the Near East at that moment of the war.

The paragraphs are brief and businesslike. Not a word is wasted and each deals with one aspect of Feisal's observations. Every point is made clearly and efficiently and the points build together into a brilliantly clear view of the Near East situation at that time. It is the kind of craftsmanship that is so efficient that it looks childishly easy.

Here is another passage which is an interesting example of modern paragraphing. The author sets out to make a rather subtle idea about poetry clear to an audience of English working men. It is a fine example of perspicuity attained by gradually unfolding an argument with the aid of simple words and metaphors, and exercising the greatest care in sentence and paragraph construction.

Poetry is an Art,—that is, it is one of the Fine Arts,—and, using the word in this recognized sense, all Art is the expression of Ideas in some sensuous material or medium. And the Ideas, in taking material forms of beauty, make a direct appeal to the emotions through the senses.

Thus the material or medium, as it is called, of Sculpture is stone or marble, and so on; the medium of Painting is colours; the medium of Music is sound; and the medium of Poetry is words.

Now while it would be manifestly preposterous to begin the study of Sculpture by an examination of stones, you will admit that in Painting a knowledge of Colours is less remote, and is even a necessary equipment of the artist: and you will further grant that in

Music the study of the Sounds—i.e. the notes of the scale and their mutual relations—is an indispensable preliminary. So that in these three Arts, if they are taken in this order, Sculpture, Painting, Music we see the medium in its relation to the Art rising step by step in significance: and I think it is evident that in Poetry the importance of the material is even greater than it is in Music; and the reason is very plain.

All Art, we said, was the expression of ideas in a sensuous medium. Now Words, the medium of Poetry, actually are Ideas; whereas neither Stone nor Colour nor mere Sound can be called Ideas, though they seem in this order to make a gradual approach towards them.

I hope this may reconcile you to the method of inquiring into Poetry by the examination of Words. I propose to consider Words, first as Ideas, secondly as Vocal Sounds.<sup>1</sup>

This is not description but persuasion. The writer sets out to persuade his readers to agree to considering poetry by considering words. So he starts off 'Poetry is an Art'. Now 'all Art is the expression of Ideas'. He goes through that carefully; and then we come to 'Words . . . actually are Ideas', and the persuasion is achieved.

The paragraphs here assist the reasoning closely. Every one is a distinct step in the argument. It is very evident from this passage that the paragraph may be looked on in one way as a device of punctuation. It suggests a pause or rest, so that when so much has been assimilated, the reader may go on to another stage. This will be found equally true of the descriptive passages already quoted.

From these examples the reader may have

<sup>1</sup> ROBERT BRIDGES, *Essays* (Clarendon Press), 28 (normalized spelling)

inferred that modern prose likes brief paragraphs. That is not altogether true, as the next example will show, but it is a point worth noticing. There is a preference for the short paragraph, and from the models offered here the student may learn much that will assist him in his own composition.

Here are two paragraphs by another great contemporary artist in prose. This is neither description nor persuasion, but the reflections of a cultivated man, amusing, cynical. The appeal is to a cultivated audience, so there is not the same necessity for simplicity. The audience will enjoy the generous development of a theme. Perspicuity is not at all sacrificed, but the movement is leisurely. He has at least as much to say as any of the others, but he rejects any urgency of manner.

A hundred years ago there lived a philosopher called Jeremy Bentham who was universally recognized to be a very wicked man. I remember to this day the first time that I came across his name when I was a boy. It was a statement by the Rev. Sydney Smith to the effect that Bentham thought people ought to make soup of their dead grandmothers. This practice appeared to me to be as undesirable from a culinary as from a moral point of view, and I therefore conceived a bad opinion of Bentham. Long afterwards, I discovered that the statement was one of those reckless lies in which respectable people are wont to indulge in the interests of virtue. I also discovered what was the really serious charge against him. It was no less than this: that he defined a 'good' man as a man who does good. This definition, as the reader will perceive at once if he is right-minded, is subversive of all true morality. How much more exalted is the attitude of Kant, who lays it down that a kind action is not virtuous if it springs from affection for the beneficiary, but only if it is inspired by the

moral law, which is, of course, just as likely to inspire unkind actions. We know that the exercise of virtue should be its own reward, and it seems to follow that the enduring of it on the part of the patient should be its own punishment. Kant, therefore, is a more sublime moralist than Bentham, and has the suffrages of all those who tell us that they love virtue for its own sake.

It is true that Bentham fulfilled his own definition of a good man: he did much good. The forty middle years of the nineteenth century in England were years of incredibly rapid progress, materially, intellectually, and morally. At the beginning of the period comes the Reform Act, which made Parliament representative of the middle-classes, not, as before, of the aristocracy. This Act was the most difficult of the steps towards democracy in England, and was quickly followed by other important reforms, such as the abolition of slavery in Jamaica. At the beginning of the period the penalty for petty theft was death by hanging; very soon the death penalty was confined to those who were guilty of murder or high treason. The Corn Laws, which made food so dear as to cause atrocious poverty, were abolished in 1846. Compulsory education was introduced in 1870. It is the fashion to decry the Victorians, but I wish our age had half as good a record as theirs. This, however, is beside the point. My point is that a very large proportion of the progress during these years must be attributed to the influence of Bentham. There can be no doubt that nine-tenths of the people living in England in the latter part of the last century were happier than they would have been if he had never lived. So shallow was his philosophy that he would have regarded this as a vindication of his activities. We, in our more enlightened age, can see that such a view is preposterous; but it may fortify us to review the grounds for rejecting a grovelling utilitarianism such as that of Bentham.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> BERTRAND RUSSELL, *Sceptical Essays* (Allen & Unwin).

No sentence could be more delicious for an essay opening than the first. It has the simplicity and blitheness of the opening of a fairy story. The sentences are short, giving neatness and point to the satire, till the delicious 'This definition, as the reader will perceive at once if he is right-minded, is subversive of all true morality'. Then they lengthen for the scourging of the Kantians.

The second paragraph adopts the same sentence formation with a different purpose; the writer wishes to remind the reader as briefly as possible of a number of things we owe to Bentham. The satirical manner has been dropped and is only resumed in the last two sentences: 'So shallow was his philosophy. . . .' Paragraphs like this have a greater range. They allow of development and change of mood within themselves. Yet the outstanding thing about them is the smooth progress from sentence to sentence. There is no roughness anywhere. The paragraphs are as smooth as silk. Their 'texture' (to adopt Matthew Arnold's word) is perfect.

The next example comes from the eighteenth century. This was the first great time for the paragraph in English prose. The seventeenth century gave us wonderful prose, as wonderful in its sound-harmonies as in its matter. But it was not organized in the modern way; particularly, it neglected the possibilities of the paragraph. The eighteenth century organized English prose and in particular developed the paragraph as a logical and sensuous unit. Our modern paragraphs are different from the following examples but they are developments from them:

The protection of the Rhaetian frontier and the persecution of the Catholic church detained Constantine in Italy above eighteen months after the departure of Julian. Before the Emperor returned into the East, he indulged his pride and curiosity in a visit to the ancient capital. He proceeded from Milan to Rome along the Aemilian and Flaminian ways; and, as soon as he approached within forty miles of the city, the march of a prince who had never vanquished a foreign enemy assumed the appearance of a triumphal procession. His splendid train was composed of all the ministers of luxury; but in a time of profound peace, he was encompassed by the glittering arms of the numerous squadrons of his guards and cuirassiers. Their streaming banners of silk, embossed with gold, and shaped in the form of dragons, waved round the person of the Emperor. Constantine sat alone on a lofty car resplendent with gold and precious gems; and, except when he bowed his head to pass under the gates of the cities, he affected a stately demeanour of inflexible and, as it might seem, of insensible gravity. The severe discipline of the Persian youth had been introduced by the eunuchs into the imperial palace; and such were the habits of patience which they had inculcated, that during a slow and sultry march, he was never seen to move his hand towards his face, or to turn his eyes either to the right or to the left. He was received by the magistrates of the Senate of Rome; and the Emperor surveyed with attention the civil honours of the republic and the consular images of the noble families. The streets were lined with an innumerable multitude. Their repeated acclamations expressed their joy at beholding, after an absence of thirty-two years, the sacred person of their sovereign; and Constantine himself expressed, with some pleasantry, his affected surprise that the human race should thus suddenly be collected on the same spot. The son of Constantine was lodged in the ancient palace of Augustus; he presided in the Senate, harangued the people from the tribunal which Cicero had so often

ascended, assisted with unusual courtesy at the games of the circus, and accepted the crown of gold, as well as the panegyrics which had been prepared for the ceremony by the deputies of the principal cities. His short visit of thirty days was employed in viewing the monuments of art and power, which were scattered over the seven hills and the adjacent valleys. He admired the awful majesty of the capital, the vast extent of the baths of Caracalla and Diocletian, the severe simplicity of the Pantheon, the massy greatness of the amphitheatre of Pompey and the temple of peace, and, above all, the stately structure of the forum and column of Trajan; acknowledging that the voice of fame, so prone to invent and to magnify, had made an inadequate report of the metropolis of the world. The traveller, who has contemplated the ruins of ancient Rome, may conceive some imperfect idea of the sentiments which they must have inspired when they reared their heads in the splendour of unsullied beauty.<sup>1</sup>

That is a magnificent organization of movement and matter, with admirable variety in the sentence structure. At the beginning, the irony is assisted by the balancing of the phrases: 'The protection of the Rhaetian frontier . . . the persecution of the Catholic church.' There is as much the virtue of direct simplicity in 'The streets were lined with an innumerable multitude' as there is the felicity of perfect poise and balance in 'Their repeated acclamations expressed their joy at beholding, after an absence of thirty-two years, the sacred person of their sovereign; and Constantine himself expressed, with some pleasantry, his affected surprise that the human race should thus suddenly be collected on the same spot'.

<sup>1</sup> GIBBON.

Such variety in succeeding sentences sets off one against the other effectively. The next, and the next but one again, are the familiar loose accumulation of clauses, the second rounded by the sonorous phrase within phrase 'acknowledging that the voice of fame, so prone to invent and magnify, had made an inadequate report of the metropolis of the world'. The heavy-treading slow syllables of the last sentence appropriately round off the whole structure.

The subject of the paragraph is Constantine's visit to Rome. Modern prose would never attempt to describe this in a single paragraph. It shows the greatness of the writer and his century that it should be attempted and with such success. Organizing the whole incident into one paragraph even seems to add to the magnificence of the story: nor could the splendour of Imperial Rome receive more adequate expression than in this sonorous organization of words.

The generation of Gibbon, Burke, Johnson and Goldsmith was a generation of great paragraphists. The curious felicity which is the stamp of Goldsmith's style is evident in this paragraph of three variously modulated sentences:

How far you may be pleased with the versification and more mechanical parts of this attempt, I don't pretend to inquire; but I know you will object (and indeed several of our best and wisest friends will concur in this opinion) that the depopulation it deplores is nowhere to be seen, and the disorders it laments are only to be found in the poet's own imagination. To this I can scarcely make any other answer, than that I sincerely believe what I have written; that I have taken all possible pains, in my

country excursions, for these four or five years past, to be certain of what I allege; and that all my views and inquiries have led me to believe these miseries real, which I here attempt to display. But this is not the place to enter into an inquiry whether the country be depopulated or not: the discussion would take up too much room, and I should prove myself, at best, an indifferent politician, to tire the reader with a long preface, when I want his unfatigued attention to a long poem.<sup>1</sup>

The quality of these sentences is grave sincerity. This is appropriate to his subject, courteous to his friend, Sir Joshua Reynolds, to whom the dedication is addressed, and to the reader. All these things are consciously in the writer's mind; and at the same time he arranges his argument with a brevity that is masterly economy.

A paragraph from Burke is not to be resisted. Here is one that very adequately illustrates his mastery. Who else could achieve a similar paragraph of four sentences, the first of three words, the second of five, the third of eight, and then a sentence of glorious amplitude and cumulating speed and emphasis—and all about paper currency?

This was unnatural. The rest is in order. They have found their punishment in their success. Laws overturned; tribunals subverted; industry without vigour; commerce expiring; the revenue unpaid, yet the people impoverished; a church pillaged, and a state not relieved; civil and military anarchy made the constitution of the kingdom; everything human and divine sacrificed to the idol of public credit, and national bankruptcy the consequence; and to crown all, the paper securities of new, precarious, tottering power, the beggared rapine, held out as a currency

<sup>1</sup> Dedication to *The Deserted Village*.

for the support of an empire, in lieu of the two great recognized species that represent the lasting conventional credit of mankind, which disappeared and hid themselves in the earth from whence they came, when the principle of property, whose creatures and representatives they are, was systematically subverted.

In that long sentence the consequences are shown in slow, damning procession, one, two, three, four, and the fifth an antithesis, then the sixth and seventh bleak as the first four, and to the eighth a special consequence of its own added, then the ninth longer, deepening the damnation. So with the words 'and to crown all' his emotion rises, the speed quickens, a figure of speech is used, the personification of gold and silver, and all the consequences are embodied in the damning generalization that the 'principle of property . . . was systematically subverted'.

The leader of the brilliant society which included three writers just quoted was Dr Johnson. As a writer also his leadership was recognized. 'His dictatorship in literature, based on native strength, was most unquestioned in the sphere of style; and it is not too much to say that all that is best in English prose since his day is his debtor in respect of not a few of its highest qualities, above all in respect of absolute lucidity, unfailing vigour, and saving common sense.' That was said by Henry Craik forty years ago; and it expresses a view that is now generally accepted. The following paragraph is a tribute to the poet Gray, whom Johnson disliked. But Johnson's honesty will not withhold praise when it is due. So this fine paragraph ends the criticism of Gray's work in *The Lives of the Poets*.

In the character of his *Elegy* I rejoice to concur with the common reader; for by the common sense of readers uncorrupted with literary prejudices, after all the refinements of subtlety and the dogmatism of learning, must be finally decided all claims to poetical honours. The *Churchyard* abounds with images which find a mirror in every mind, and with sentiments to which every bosom returns an echo. The four stanzas beginning 'Yet even these bones', are to me original: I have never seen the notions in any other place; yet he that reads them here, persuades himself that he has always felt them. Had Gray written always thus, it had been vain to blame, and useless to praise him.

It is an inversion of the familiar shape of the paragraph to have the only short sentence at the end. The balance 'vain to blame . . . useless to praise' gives it sufficient weight, and the position of the sentence at the end of the paragraph and of the Life gives it great force. Not only is the compliment gracefully expressed, but Johnson placed it so that it has never been forgotten since he wrote it.

Such pleasures are not for modern days. We live in an urgent world. Leisure has been taken from our days and from our dreams. There is much to be done; and that which is to be done must be done quickly. This feeling is reflected in prose. Human liberty is being threatened again by men and mobs. This is reflected in prose; for prose, as it is the voice of liberty when men are free, is also the weapon of liberty when freedom is threatened. Prose today is the expression of stark necessity. Liberty must be defended, and this final quotation comes from one of the latest defences:

I mean by liberty the absence of restraint upon the existence of those social conditions which, in modern civilization, are the necessary guarantees of individual happiness. I seek to inquire into the terms upon which it is attainable in the Western world, and, more especially, to find those rules of conduct to which political authority must conform if its subjects are, in a genuine sense, to be free.

Already, therefore, I am maintaining a thesis. I am arguing, first, that liberty is essentially an absence of restraint. It implies power to expand, the choice by the individual of his own way of life without imposed prohibitions from without. Men cannot, as Rousseau, be forced into freedom. They do not, as Hegel insisted, find their liberty in obedience to the law. They are free when the rules under which they live leave them without a sense of frustration in realms they deem significant. They are unfree whenever the rules to which they have to conform compel them to conduct which they dislike and resent. I do not deny that there are types of conduct against which prohibitions are desirable: I ought, for instance, to be compelled, even against my wish, to educate my children. But I am arguing that any rule which demands from me something I would not otherwise give is a diminution of my freedom.

A second impression is important. My thesis involves the view that if in any state there is a body of men who possess unlimited political power, those over whom they rule can never be free. For the one assured result of historical investigation is the lesson that uncontrolled power is invariably poisonous to those who possess it. They are always tempted to impose their canon on others, and, in the end, they assume that the good of the community depends upon the continuance of their power. Liberty always demands a limitation of political authority, and it is never attained unless the rulers of a state can, where necessary, be called to account. That is why Pericles insisted that the secret of liberty is courage.

By making liberty the absence of restraint, I make

it, of course, a purely negative condition. I do not thereby mean to assume that a man will be the happier the more completely restraints are absent from the society to which he belongs. In a community like our own, the pressure of numbers and the diversity of desires make necessary both rules and compulsions. Each of these is a limitation upon freedom. Some of them are essential to happiness, but that does not make them for a moment less emphatically limitations. Our business is to secure such a balance between the liberty we need and the authority which is essential as to leave the average man with the clear sense that he has elbowroom for the continuous expression of his personality.<sup>1</sup>

Quiet and clear, without any of the colour and glamour of former days, but with a vision of life no less noble, this is the prose which has been evolved by the necessities of modern European life.

<sup>1</sup> H. J. LASKI, *Liberty in the Modern State* (Penguin).

## CHAPTER V

### PROSE FORMS

PROSE is used to explain and to play upon the emotions; it is used in argument and exposition, in description and narration. Think what that implies and you will come to the conclusion that the whole world is run on prose. The battle orders in the latest war, the reports of the League of Nations, the researches of scientists, the manifestos of political parties, the letters of business men, the enormous output of novels, biographies and essays, the daily millions of newspapers and the feeding of the whole world with wireless depend upon prose.

Wireless in the last few years has brought back to the spoken word something of its ancient importance, when books of Rhetoric were written by Greeks and Romans for speakers rather than writers. The wireless speaker, more than any speaker in the world before, has to remember the precept of the old rhetoricians that the speaker's first care is to persuade his audience to listen to him. For he depends upon his voice and his ability to catch his audience with the first few sentences. Otherwise, they will tune in to some other station at once. Fortunately, his problems require from us only a passing mention.

The same is true of the Press, though the modern newspaper has affected modern prose in

a very definite way. The newspaper is written for an audience of people with little time to give to it, who want the day's news from all over the world. Modern life is so intimate that no important events anywhere in the world can be ignored by intelligent people. Furthermore, the newspaper is out of date the next day, and is hardly ever looked at again. So in the first place there is the necessity for easy reading, and in the second no necessity for permanence. The result is that in newspapers the sentences are short and there is not much thought for paragraphing. Evidently, the modern English tendency to short, clipped sentences and brief paragraphing has something to do with the necessities of the newspapers.<sup>1</sup>

A form which we naturally associate with the newspaper is the PAMPHLET. A pamphlet is a prose essay which endeavours to persuade the reader on some topic of public interest, usually religious, social or political. The pamphleteer therefore seeks the biggest audience he can get and he is concerned to write about his subject so simply that anyone who picks up his pamphlet will understand him. It is with this ideal that Ruskin wrote his *Unto This Last*, which remains a model of perspicuity and was for its time enlightened and even revolutionary economics. It was with this ideal that Swift wrote his great pamphlet *The Conduct of the Allies* which stopped a war. So today Mr

<sup>1</sup> 'Fifty million people in Great Britain can read and write. Throughout their waking lives they are unceasingly bombarded with words. Moreover, the overwhelming force of this bombardment comes principally from two central sources: the written word from the newspaper and the spoken word from the B.B.C.' CHARLES MADGE in *The Mind in Chains* (Muller).

Bernard Shaw startles England with something so effectively written that it looks quite obvious and nobody can think why he never thought of it before. From the time of the Elizabethans, to Milton and Defoe and Swift, to Johnson and Burke and Tom Paine, to Cobbett and Wordsworth and Shelley and Kingsley and Morris to our own day, England has had sufficient freedom of speech for good pamphleteering. The result is that English is unusually rich in pamphlet literature and has models for anyone with the itch to reform.<sup>1</sup>

By its history, the ESSAY in English is closely associated with the pamphlet. When Addison and Steele set the modern essay going<sup>2</sup> they were as ardent as any pamphleteers. They were definitely concerned with reforming morals and manners, and never have men pursued that task so delightfully for so many unbroken months and years. Since their time the essay has grown so as to defy definition. A host of writers including Johnson followed them throughout their century. The most delightful compositions in this kind were written by Hazlitt and Lamb after the turn of the century. They have made the word 'essay' thrill us with pleasure: they are the greatest of the true literary essayists. The delicious intimacy of Lamb and the unfailing gusto of Hazlitt, the joy from the actual writing which both offer us have never

<sup>1</sup> See *A Miscellany of Tracts and Pamphlets* (World's Classics).

<sup>2</sup> Bacon's 1598 *Essays* is a concise little handbook for courtiers: his final revision of 1625 is a collection of prose pieces which cannot be too highly praised, and their splendid variety of manner displays a virtuosity which has not been sufficiently admired. But they remain before and apart from the continuous history of the essay, which begins with Addison and Steele.

been approached. Since them generations have tried. Like them they have sought a style which will 'lap the reader round' and carry him away as only poetry is expected to do; like them they have exploited their personalities. Stevenson and Beerbohm have succeeded to a point, but Stevenson admitted that 'we are mighty fine fellows but we cannot write like William Hazlitt'.

At the same time the term was expected to embrace the fulminating judgements upon literature of the critics of Hazlitt's day like Jeffrey and Gifford who attacked poets like Keats. Their successors in the next generation were Macaulay and Carlyle. Their essays were treatises, interesting in their views, remarkable in lucidity and brilliance. Ostensibly reviewing a book, its subject was the excuse for a treatise of their own, and the book itself was often scarcely noticed. The tradition was carried on by men like Bagehot and Leslie Stephen but has not come down to our own day. Such essays cannot be recommended as models for prose writing; the imitator invariably writes ponderously.

Another type of essay grew during the last century among the scientists. Men like Huxley wished to impart their new outlook on life to the common people. They wrote popular essays and gave popular lectures. This kind of essay is the most fascinating today. With the help of contemporary scientists like Julian Huxley and Sullivan and Haldane we can all keep in touch with the amazing adventure of exploration of modern scientists. For any who doubt whether such essays may be accounted as literature, here is

the defence of Mr Sullivan: 'Science is . . . valued because it gratifies disinterested curiosity, and it is valued because it provides the contemplative imagination with objects of great æsthetic charm.' The work of these scientists is a notable contribution to civilizing the modern world. It is another example of history repeating itself, since their intention is not dissimilar to that of Addison and Steele.

In pure literature the **SHORT STORY** now monopolizes the place previously held by the essay. Dozens of short stories are published in magazines every week and selections and collections of these are published in book form frequently. The form is as old as literature, but it has been so perfected in the last hundred years that it is excusable to ignore earlier examples.

The short story has the greatest range in literature. Almost any subject-matter is good material for a short story in the hands of a skilful writer. Science, travel, history, all times and places are within the scope of this form. And fortunately the trammels of language seem to affect the short story less than any other art form. Some of the greatest short story writers have been French or Russian, but their work survives translation. All these factors accumulate to make the short story an immensely varied and endlessly entertaining kind.

Its difficulties however should not be underestimated, for that would diminish its pleasures. Because of its length, as in the essay the effect must be secured immediately. The characters must be outlined swiftly, the atmosphere of the

time and place created rapidly. There is no time for unessential material: every word must be necessary to the theme, whether it be to outline a character, tell an exciting story, display a mood, show the outlook of some fraction of mankind, or create one of those fantasies of the brain which are so loved by short story writers.

There have been many masters of the short story in English during the century. Of those recently gone, Galsworthy, Conrad, Kipling and D. H. Lawrence were the greatest; of those still writing, H. G. Wells, Somerset Maugham and A. E. Coppard are among the finest artists in the form.

There is a special interest in reading a collection of short stories by a writer or of contemporaries in one language. The writer's outlook on life becomes apparent in the first, the mood of a people is reflected in the second.

But the extraordinary things about the form are that everyone loves it and (when the writer is an artist) anything may become good material for a short story.

It is more difficult to speak briefly of the NOVEL. In the first place, it is the most important form in use today. In the second, more than any other form of literature ever evolved, it is a picture of life and an interpretation of life. D. H. Lawrence said: 'The novel is a great discovery, far greater than Galileo's telescope, or somebody else's wireless. The novel is the highest form of human expression so far attained.' At its best it is as philosophical as history and as profound as tragedy itself. Definition is again difficult. Mr Priestley,

in a valuable discussion, says: 'The only definition of the novel I can offer is that it is a narrative in prose treating chiefly of imaginary characters.' Mr E. M. Forster says: 'The novel tells a story. That is a fundamental aspect without which it could not exist. That is the highest factor common to all novels.'

It would be difficult to define the kinds of character found in novels. Sometimes, as in poor novels like *Ivanhoe*, there is no character in the characters at all; they are like pasteboard figures. Sometimes, as in the novels of Meredith, they are intense creatures who live in a world that never was. Sometimes, like the peasants in the greater novels of Scott, they are as real as anyone we know.

The narrative of a novel usually has a shape; the presenting of a situation, its complication and solution. Sometimes a novel will give a magnificent panorama of a period of history, like *Old Mortality* and *War and Peace*. In such novels we see the common people as well as the great ones of the earth growing out of a past and passing things on in the great stream of human existence; we see the present as a result of the past. That is the best type of historical novel. Sometimes the novel offers the mental experiences of one or two human beings, as in *Crime and Punishment* and *Madame Bovary*. Sometimes it is a family history, as in *The Forsyte Saga* and *The Pasquier Chronicles*; and this has obvious relations with the historical novel. Sometimes the crisis in a single life is taken, and a number of beautifully formed novels have recently been written about

individuals over a period of the one or two days that are the most important in their lives. But there is no making rules for the novel, and no defining its variety; the definitions quoted above are wise in being so general.

Narrative and character there must always be, however small the proportion of either; but after that nothing confines the novelist. Mr Harold Nicolson offers him one 'certain rule' which he may use as a test of his working with stories and characters. 'This, I think, is the only certain rule about the making of novels. They must be organic; they must have a life of their own independent of their author: and if the moment never comes when this sense of independent life fills you with a glad astonishment, then you may be assured that your book will be still-born.'

It is a pleasant diversion from novel reading to read a *PLAY*. The movement of a play is quicker and more excited. The long preparation of the plot cannot be given; there is only time for the critical part of the story. The prose used in plays is different from all others in its speed and neatness. In a play, much depends on gesture and intonation. The reader has to supply these for himself, and the reading of plays calls for a great deal of exertion. It may be a misfortune that the two greatest playwrights of the passing generation were concerned not merely to portray life but to correct it. Shaw and Galsworthy both pamphleteer in their plays. But they are both eminently readable, probably more so than Oscar Wilde and Barrie and Synge, the other playwrights of the past fifty years whose work cannot go without

mention. The wit of Wilde, the stagecraft of Barrie and the imaginative power of Synge are superlatively fine.

BIOGRAPHY and AUTOBIOGRAPHY are prose forms that have become increasingly fashionable during the century. Biographies used to be written out of admiration, like Boswell's *Johnson*. The faults of the subject were not stressed and were sometimes suppressed. But a fashion was set in the last century for the grim revelation of every detail, pleasant and unpleasant, of the life of the subject. Later, Lytton Strachey wrote ironic biographies of people he rather despised; and his biographies of Victorians form a criticism of that Age. Biography is a branch of history; and it undertakes the historian's most difficult task—to understand and interpret the mind and spirit of another human being. It is also today the most popular branch of history; especially when it avoids that responsibility and deals easily and familiarly with intimate life and the fashions and outlook of an age.

To write an autobiography appears to have become an obligation on the part of a literary man. Mr Chesterton said in his: 'I am here engaged in the morbid and degrading task of telling the story of my life.' Mr Kipling honoured the obligation and in doing so gave us the best book, except *Kim*, he ever wrote. Mr Wells' *Experiment in Autobiography* is of very great interest. The best of the autobiographies however is still Trollope's, and any young man imitating his forthright manner of writing will not go wrong.

TRAVEL is almost a department of autobiography, for it does not so much matter where the traveller goes as the mind he takes with him. Mr Norman Douglas goes so far as to say: 'It seems to me that the reader of a good travel book is entitled not only to an exterior voyage, to descriptions of scenery and so forth, but to an interior, a sentimental or temperamental voyage, which takes place side by side with that outer one; and that the ideal book of this kind offers us, indeed, a triple opportunity of exploration—abroad, into the author's brain, and into our own. The writer should therefore possess a brain worth exploring.' The old idea of a travel book was to tell wonderful things of far lands; but the world today is small and every child can see it in the cinema and hear it on the wireless. The modern travel writer must be a man of original mind.

English is extraordinarily rich in travel books. Some of the most skilful of English prose writers in this century, Gissing, D. H. Lawrence and Norman Douglas, have written of Italy and the Mediterranean around it. Travel books in English are written of every part of the world. Those of the Himalayas, if mountaineering be included, are very fine; but the best are of Arabia, and the greatest of these are by Doughty and T. E. Lawrence. Their books, *Arabia Deserta* and *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, are among the prose works in this age of prose which are unlikely to die.

Travel books, like nearly all the other kinds we have considered, reveal the character of the author. There are some prose subjects in which the author prefers to conceal his character, conceal

everything personal as out of place, conceal especially everything personal about the style, and let the subject take the whole attention. We have already seen that this is true of scientific writing. It is true of history, and philosophers would like it to be true of philosophy. These subjects today follow the traditions of writing which were formed in the eighteenth century. Only then did English writers learn to write philosophy and achieve real history. These academic subjects have changed very little in their fashion of writing since that time.

These are the kinds of prose flourishing in English today. They offer a range of subject-matter unsurpassed in human history. They are expressed in a language wonderfully adequate as a means of expression and communication; and in a prose style as clear and simple as the needs of the age demand.

## PROSODY

## TABLE

### *Feet*

Iamb.	˘ —
Trochee.	— ˘
Anapæst.	˘ ˘ —

### *Lines*

Iambic trimeter.	˘ —   ˘ —   ˘ —
Iambic tetrameter.	˘ —   ˘ —   ˘ —   ˘ —
Iambic pentameter.	˘ —   ˘ —   ˘ —   ˘ —   ˘ —
Anapæstic tetrameter.	˘ ˘ —   ˘ ˘ —   ˘ ˘ —   ˘ ˘ —

### *A Simple Stanza*

˘ — | ˘ — | ˘ — | ˘ — | ˘ —      4xa —  
I put | my hat | upon | my head  
And walked | ˘ — | ˘ — | ˘ — | ˘ —      3xa a  
And there | ˘ — | ˘ — | ˘ — | ˘ —      4xa —  
Whose hat | ˘ — | ˘ — | ˘ — | ˘ —      3xa a

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTORY

*Enthusiasm has its rules . . . in mere confusion there is neither grace nor greatness.*—JOHNSON.

VERSE may be defined as the expression of idea in language which follows a regularly recurring pattern of sounds. The primary unit of this pattern in English is the *foot*. A foot in English verse consists of either two or three syllables. The two-syllable foot in which the first syllable is unstressed and the second stressed is used much more than any other. A number of feet make a *line*. The usual line lengths are those of three, four and five feet. The foot and the line are the bases of the poem. The poem consists of a number of lines. The lines may be all of the same length, repeated indefinitely, or lines of the same or varying lengths may be arranged in groups which are called *stanzas*. Where there are stanzas one pattern is usually adhered to throughout the poem. Rhyme is nearly always used in poems which are divided into stanzas and very frequently in those which are not divided into stanzas. There are examples of feet, lines and a stanza on the opposite page.

These are the questions which are considered in this chapter.

There is a preliminary question which any one studying metre naturally asks: Why do poet

write in metre? The answer depends upon the fact that every language has its natural sound arrangement. Words have heavy and light syllables in English; e.g. we say *poetry*, the first syllable stressed and the others unstressed. When we use English words in sentences, we find them arranging themselves so that stressed and unstressed syllables (or heavy and light syllables) form a pattern. For example, the last sentence runs: 'When we use English words in sentences.'

In the question we asked ourselves, 'Why do poets write in metre?', the stresses fall regularly on alternate syllables. This is a common pattern in English and it is the one used most frequently by poets. The more excited the speaker or writer becomes and the more excitedly his words come pouring out, the more likely is this regular pattern to appear. Let us take some phrases from famous passages in English prose:

- 1. the *unbought grace of life*, the *cheap defence*<sup>1</sup>
- 2. have *stood unchanged for seven hundred years*<sup>2</sup>
- 3. *The apple tree, the singing, and the gold*<sup>3</sup>

These three quotations remind us of lines by Shakespeare and Milton. They have the same stress pattern, a light syllable followed by a heavy, five times over. This is the pattern most commonly used by English poets for serious, elevated expression. The language falls naturally into this pattern.

Although in a state of excitement words tend to fall naturally into these regular stress sequences, the poet often has to rearrange them before they

<sup>1</sup> BURKE.

<sup>2</sup> RUSKIN.

<sup>3</sup> GALSWORTHY.

follow this ding-dong sequence exactly. For example, I might write

I put my hat on my head  
And walked out into the Strand.

That is not metrical, but by changing 'on' into 'upon' and 'out into' into 'across' I have

I put my hat upon my head  
And walked across the Strand ] do

which gives us the sequence exactly. In the symbols usually employed we write it

U - U - U - U - ]

We observe that the poet is trying to do two things. He is trying to express his subject and he is trying to express it in language with a more or less regular series of beats. His subject has excited him originally, and the regular beating, once established, runs in his mind and increases his mental excitement so that phrases and ways of expressing his subject come to him more easily than before. Thus metre helps the poet, which is the other reason why poets use metre. Sometimes, poets tell us, the metrical excitement comes from the subject. The tune of a stanza runs in the poet's mind and beats insistently till the words come. The essential thing to realize is that whether subject or metre comes first, they work together, so that the poet expresses himself in that exalted way we call poetry.

All mental excitement when expressed does not produce measured speech. For instance, if a man is very angry, his speech certainly becomes very excited, but it is also likely to become very

incoherent. In the same way, in great grief people become inarticulate.<sup>1</sup>

So there is some other element present before speech takes on this measure. It is control: for the poet, like every other writer, must always be in full control of his language.) Therefore let us express it: (When speech is controlled to express excitement, it tends to adopt a regular stress. This regular stress in turn gives the writer greater powers of expression.) Remember that prose writers try to avoid this regularity of stress as much as poets cultivate it.

Now let us examine the commonest measure used in English verse. Take the lines quoted above:

I put my hat upon my head  
And walked across the Strand.

The measure is this:

ti-tum, ti-tum, ti-tum, ti-tum,  
ti-tum, ti-tum, ti-tum.

or, as we usually write it:

˘ — ˘ — ˘ — ˘ —  
˘ — ˘ — ˘ —

The unit in this pattern is ˘ —. We call this unit a foot. The name of this foot is 'iamb', a Greek word, like so many of our technical words on this subject, like 'metre' itself, which is derived from Greek for 'measure'. So these lines are made of

<sup>1</sup> 'For the nature of a man's words when he is strongly affected by joy, grief, or anger, must necessarily depend on the number and quality of the general truths, conceptions and images, and of the words expressing them, with which his mind had been previously stored. For the property of passion is not to create; but to set in increased activity.'—Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, ch. xvii.

iambic feet. Our argument at the beginning we may now express thus: English naturally falls into an iambic movement.

We have got a foot and we have got the line. In our quotation the lines consist of four iambic feet and three iambic feet. Let us study the whole of Johnson's silly little poem:

I put my hat upon my head  
 And walked across the Strand;  
 And there I met another man,  
 Whose hat was in his hand.

Writing down the pattern, we find that the last two lines are similar to the first two, giving:

U - U - U - U -  
 U - U - U -  
 U - U - U - U -  
 U - U - U -

There is our first stanza pattern, and it is one of the oldest and still one of the most popular in English poetry. It is called the Ballad Stanza because it is the pattern commonly used in writing ballads. It consists of four lines, the first and third made of four iambs, the second and fourth of three iambs. The short way of writing that in symbols is:

4xa

3xa

4xa

3xa

(‘x’ is a symbol for ‘unstressed’, while ‘a’ is for ‘stressed’). We used the word stanza just now. That is an Italian word meaning a pattern of lines in verse. Very often we use the word ‘verse’

inaccurately, saying, 'This is a verse of four lines'. To be accurate, use 'verse' for the line, and 'stanza' for the pattern of lines.

There is another thing to observe about this Ballad Stanza. 'Strand' and 'hand' end with the same sounds. This we call 'rhyme' and rhyme is one of the pleasures in reading English poetry. So it is important that we understand clearly what rhyme is. A rhyme is made when the vowel sounds in the last syllable of the lines are alike, preceded by a different consonant and followed by the same consonantal sound. The stress must come on the rhyming syllable. So 'Strand' and 'hand' rhyme perfectly.

Let us examine some other verse and stanza patterns. Here is another quatrain (or stanza of four lines) in which every line has three feet:

The man of life upright,  
 Whose guiltless heart is free  
 From all dishonest deeds,  
 Or thought of vanity;  
 The man whose silent days  
 In harmless joys are spent,  
 Whom hopes cannot delude,  
 Nor sorrow discontent;<sup>1</sup>

The short lines and the simple stanza give the effect of simplicity and unpretentiousness which the poet is seeking to express. In our new symbols, the stanza is:

3xa -  
 3xa a  
 3xa -  
 3xa a

<sup>1</sup> O.B.V. 185: i.e. No. 185 in *The Oxford Book of English Verse* (2nd ed., 1939).

The second column marks the rhymes. The system of rhyme marking is very simple, 'a' for the first rhyme and every time it is repeated in the stanza, 'b' for the second, 'c' for the third and so on through the alphabet, beginning again in every new stanza. For a line without rhyme there is no recognized symbol: the one used here (-) will be employed throughout this book.

Here is another stanza pattern only slightly different from the Ballad:

To-night the winds begin to rise  
 And roar from yonder dropping day:  
 The last red leaf is whirl'd away,  
 The rooks are blown about the skies;<sup>1</sup>

Here every line is made of four iambic feet and it rhymes *abba*. Using our special vocabulary, we shall describe it as a stanza made of four iambic tetrameters, rhyming *abba*. Tetrameter is derived from the Greek for 'four measures' and trimeter from the Greek for 'three measures'. In English, 'tetrameter' is used for a line of four feet, 'trimeter' for one of three. Using these words, we can describe the Ballad Stanza as having four lines, the first and third tetrameters, the second and fourth trimeters, rhyming on the trimeters.

Let us take another example of a stanza made of four tetrameters. The last was by Tennyson, this is by Browning:

The rain set early in to-night,  
 The sullen wind was soon awake,  
 It tore the elm-tops down for spite,  
 And did its worst to vex the lake:<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *English Parnassus*, p. 555.

<sup>2</sup> *O.B.V.* 729.

The metre is the same, the rhyme different. Both stanzas are descriptions of Nature in a wild, almost terrifying mood, and the subjects of both poems are sad. When we discuss the ballad stanza more fully in the next chapter, we shall see how suitable it is for telling stories, while this four-tetrameter stanza is particularly suitable for sad themes, and is reflective in its nature. As it is in these stanzas:

How happy is he born and taught  
 That serveth not another's will;  
 Whose armour is his honest thought,  
 And simple truth his utmost skill!

Whose passions not his masters are;  
 Whose soul is still prepared for death,  
 Untied unto the world by care  
 Of public fame or private breath;<sup>1</sup>

The beauty of these verses is their simplicity, which depends not merely upon the simple words, but also upon the simple iambic foot, the regular lines, and the easy rhymes. The verses breathe the calm of philosophy.

For any more sophisticated expression in English, the natural line is one foot longer. It is called the iambic pentameter and, as we said in the beginning, it is the most natural line in English for serious work. Here is a superb example in stanza form:

The Curfew tolls the knell of parting day,  
 The lowing herd wind slowly o'er the lea,  
 The plowman homeward plods his weary way,  
 And leaves the world to darkness and to me.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> O.B.V. 189.

<sup>2</sup> O.B.V. 465.

This is the line Shakespeare used in his plays, the line in which he wrote the most wonderful poetry in English. It is the line Milton used, as when he wrote these lines, among the most beautiful in English poetry:

So much I feel my genial spirits droop,  
 My hopes all flat, nature within me seems  
 In all her functions weary of herself;  
 My race of glory run, and race of shame,  
 And I shall shortly be with them that rest.<sup>1</sup>

In the last example neither stanzas nor rhymes are used. These rhymeless iambic pentameters are called Blank Verse. There is also a great deal of fine work in English in which these iambic pentameters are used with rhyme. Here is a famous example from Dryden:

In the first rank of these did Zimri stand,  
 A man so various that he seemed to be  
 Not one, but all mankind's epitome:  
 Stiff in opinions, always in the wrong,  
 Was everything by starts and nothing long;  
 But in the course of one revolving moon  
 Was chemist, fiddler, statesman, and buffoon.<sup>2</sup>

The lines pair off in rhymes, or go in couples. This is therefore called couplet writing, and iambic pentameter couplets are called Heroic Couplets. The example chosen is superb satiric portraiture, but the heroic couplet was originally used for story-telling, and got the first part of its name because it was later thought to be the appropriate metre for heroic or epic poetry.

The pentameter is not the only line used in

<sup>1</sup> *Samson Agonistes*.

<sup>2</sup> *English Parnassus*, p. 159.

this couplet form. The four-foot line has been very popular in English too, for it is a swift and sensitive vehicle of expression.

It happen'd on a Winter's night,  
As authors of the legend write,  
Two brother hermits, saints by trade,  
Taking their tour in masquerade,  
Disguised in tatter'd habits, went  
To a small village down in Kent.<sup>1</sup>

L'Allegro and Il Penseroso are the best-known poems written in these tetrameter couplets, which can be used for narrative, description and satire. Because of its daintiness this couplet has become the natural verse for the telling of fairy stories.

The iambic tetrameter and the iambic pentameter are the most commonly used verses in English. Verses have been made in anything from one foot to eight feet. The six-foot form is so popular in other European literatures that it was much experimented with in English. But it was not very manageable; it tended to break in the middle, so that it really became two threes. The pentameter proved to be the natural, manageable line. In Blank Verse, in Heroic Couplets and in various stanzas it is the staple line for serious expression in English poetry.

The iamb is not the only English foot. There are two other feet commonly used, which give very interesting effects. Here are some verses by Goldsmith in which he used a foot of two short and one long syllables, called the 'anapæst'. In a dining club, of which Burke and Reynolds were members, people were given to making fun of

<sup>1</sup> SWIFT, *Baucis and Philemon*.

Goldsmith, though they respected and loved him, and he retaliated in this poem. He did not wish to be harsh, but he wanted his thrusts to get home. So he toned down the searching truths of his statements by expressing them in this quick, lively movement—the reader would be on to the next phrase before the last had time to sting. These lines are on Burke:

Who, born for the Universe, narrow'd his mind,  
And to party gave up what was meant for mankind.<sup>1</sup>

This movement is quite different from the iambic. Take the first line to pieces and see how it runs. The heavy stresses are on 'born', 'Un', 'nar' and 'mind'. The first foot in the first line is short-long or long-long and the others are anapæsts. In symbols:

○ - | ○ ○ - | ○ ○ - | ○ ○ -  
or      - - | ○ ○ - | ○ ○ - | ○ ○ -

What is the effect of this new foot? Repeat aloud:

ti-tum, ti-tum, ti-tum, ti-tum

and then:

ti-ti-tum, ti-ti-tum, ti-ti-tum, ti-ti-tum.

The second line reads more quickly than the first. It is like the difference between a horse walking and a horse galloping. Take another example, written entirely in anapæsts:

The Assyrian came down like a wolf on the fold.

The horses of the Assyrians can be heard galloping in these lines, and that is why Byron used anapæsts. The poet, as was observed before,

<sup>1</sup> *English Parnassus*, p. 234.

always arranges for the maximum assistance from his metre.

There is one more foot which appears commonly in English verses, the trochee. Here is an example from Keats:

Souls of poets dead and gone,  
What Elysium have you known,  
Happy field or mossy cavern,  
Choicer than the Mermaid Tavern?

In symbols:

— ⌈ | ⌈ — ⌈ | ⌈ — ⌈

The trochee (— ⌈) gives verses brightness, crispness and speed. The missing syllable at the end of the first two lines will be discussed later.

We have now the elements of the subject; the foot, the line, a little about stanzas, and what a true rhyme is. There is nothing mysterious about it, and there is no difficulty that we cannot overcome. We shall study now in detail the various lines and stanzas in which great English poetry has been written. Some people think this is a dull business because they do not understand how simple and important the study of metre is. It is an important and fascinating study because the foot, the line and the stanza a poet uses make all the difference between success and failure to him in expressing his thoughts and feelings.

Professor Ker, a very great authority, said: 'Prosody . . . may be boredom. But it is impossible to understand poetry without it. The choice of metre by a poet is not exactly like the choice out of a batch of samples. He has the abstract tune in his head before the poem begins. . . . His mind is open and responsive to different

poetical melodies, without words they settle in his mind . . . and the words come later. Prosody is the science not only of what has actually been composed in verse, but of this shadowy bodiless music in the mind of the poet before the poem is made.<sup>1</sup>

Not all poems are conceived in this way, but many great poems have been; more than enough for us to claim that this is no mechanical study, but an inquiry into the secrets of these visitations of the spirit upon man.

<sup>1</sup> *Form and Style*, p. 101.

## CHAPTER II

### A NOTE ON STRESS

WE have seen that making verses in English depends upon running words into a pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables. The words must follow the sound pattern without mispronunciation. We have seen that most comic verses and most verses from Dryden to Johnson obey this rule very obviously. We hear the regular pattern when we read their verses. But this pattern is a convention which all poets using the normal English prosody accept. Wordsworth wrote,

There  $\overset{\circ}{w}$ as |  $\overset{\circ}{a}$  time |  $\overset{\circ}{w}$ hen  $\overset{\circ}{m}$ ead |  $\overset{\circ}{o}$ w,  $\overset{\circ}{g}$ rove, |  $\overset{\circ}{a}$ nd  $\overset{\circ}{s}$ tream  
but he could not put 'meadow' after either 'grove' or 'stream' without disturbing his pattern or mispronouncing 'meadow', e.g.

There was a time when  $\overset{\circ}{g}$ rove,  $\overset{\circ}{m}$ eadow, and  $\overset{\circ}{s}$ tream

The question why a poet should submit to this convention was raised in Chapter I. The answers are that the poet finds the regular beating of the pattern increases his mental excitement so that phrases and images come to him more easily and appropriately than before: or, alternatively, as expressed by the late Professor W. P. Ker, that the poet 'has the abstract tune in his head before the poem begins. . . . His mind is . . . responsive

to different poetical melodies, without words they settle in his mind, and it moves in anapaests or trochees accordingly, and the words come later'.

Whichever answer is accepted (and both may be true) it is obvious that each implies that the poet is seeking to express, and verse patterns give him a range of expression beyond that of prose. The poet tells us something which he cannot tell us in prose.

Within these verse patterns we discovered that many liberties are permitted: that in the staple English line particularly, the iambic pentameter, liberties are tolerated. Trochees and anapaests are substituted for iambs. Redundant syllables are allowed at the end of the line. These liberties are used habitually by the greatest poets, so an inquiry into their nature is called for.

Before doing so, another liberty, which is much more astonishing and much more common than these minor deviations, must be defined, so that the whole question may be examined as one. Outside comic verse and eighteenth century verse, good English verses are rarely spoken as they are scanned. Take Milton's line:

Whom universal nature did lament

That is scanned quite correctly, without mispronouncing any word:

Whom  $\overset{\circ}{u}$  |  $\overset{\circ}{n}$   $\overset{\circ}{i}$   $\overset{\circ}{v}$   $\overset{\circ}{e}$  |  $\overset{\circ}{s}$   $\overset{\circ}{a}$   $\overset{\circ}{l}$   $\overset{\circ}{n}$  |  $\overset{\circ}{t}$   $\overset{\circ}{u}$   $\overset{\circ}{r}$   $\overset{\circ}{e}$  |  $\overset{\circ}{d}$   $\overset{\circ}{i}$   $\overset{\circ}{d}$  |  $\overset{\circ}{l}$   $\overset{\circ}{a}$   $\overset{\circ}{m}$   $\overset{\circ}{e}$   $\overset{\circ}{n}$

It never could be spoken like that. It is spoken:

Whom  $\overset{\circ}{u}$   $\overset{\circ}{n}$   $\overset{\circ}{i}$   $\overset{\circ}{v}$   $\overset{\circ}{e}$   $\overset{\circ}{s}$   $\overset{\circ}{a}$   $\overset{\circ}{l}$   $\overset{\circ}{n}$  |  $\overset{\circ}{t}$   $\overset{\circ}{u}$   $\overset{\circ}{r}$   $\overset{\circ}{e}$  |  $\overset{\circ}{d}$   $\overset{\circ}{i}$   $\overset{\circ}{d}$  |  $\overset{\circ}{l}$   $\overset{\circ}{a}$   $\overset{\circ}{m}$   $\overset{\circ}{e}$   $\overset{\circ}{n}$

Notice that the rule is not broken—the words follow the verse pattern without any mispronunciation.

What are the reasons for the liberties in the pattern, and for this apparent neglect of the pattern in reading? The first reason is one of necessity. The English language is not absolutely iambic, and will not fit into a rigid iambic form. This accounts for the substitutions. The second is that liberty permits pleasurable variety of sound. In a long poem this is important, and for example it is used with great skill in *Paradise Lost*. The third reason is more important than either of these. The liberty assists the poet in emphasizing his expression, whether of meaning or emotion.

These liberties are not associated with any pattern except the iambic pattern. The other patterns, trochaic and anapaestic, are too artificial in English for the poet to risk any liberty beyond dropping a weak syllable. It is interesting to note at the same time that these patterns are also too artificial for the most serious forms of expression.

It will be well to examine examples of iambic pentameters in which these liberties have been refused and in which they have been exploited. The first is from Johnson's *Vanity of Human Wishes*. It is the noble expression of religious hope with which Johnson concludes his examination of human vanities. It is the essence of the poet's philosophy, and in its seriousness and nobility is in every way a favourable example:

Must helpless man, in ignorance sedate,  
Roll darkling down the torrent of his fate?

Must no dislike alarm, no wishes rise,  
 No cries invoke the mercies of the skies?  
 Inquirer, cease: petitions yet remain,  
 Which Heav'n may hear: nor deem religion vain.  
 Still raise for good the supplicating voice,  
 But leave to Heav'n the measure and the choice.<sup>1</sup>

It may be suggested that in seeking a favourable example, one has been chosen in which prosodic liberties have been taken; that the fifth and seventh lines especially are not read as pentameters. If this be admitted as a debateable point, it is still clear that the iambic pattern throbs in these lines.

The opposing example is from Shakespeare's *Macbeth*:

Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow,  
 Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,  
 To the last syllable of recorded time;  
 And all our yesterdays have lighted fools  
 The way to dusty death.<sup>2</sup>

The first and third lines there take extreme liberties. They can be brought within the iambic pattern :

Tomor  $\overline{\text{row}}$  and  $\overline{\text{tomor}}$   $\overline{\text{row}}$  and  $\overline{\text{tomor}}$   $\overline{\text{row}}$

To the  $\overline{\text{last}}$   $\overline{\text{sy}}$  lable of  $\overline{\text{record}}$   $\overline{\text{ed}}$  time

but without more regular lines between them such verses would become chaotic.

Now there can be no doubt which is the greater poetry. The first is truth, fine truth; but the second strikes the reader at once as Truth itself. The first is the essence of the philosophy of a

<sup>1</sup> *English Parnassus*, p. 224.

<sup>2</sup> V, v, 19-23.

great man; the second is the inspired utterance of the Poet. It amounts to this, that Shakespeare's verses are capable of more *expression* than Johnson's.

What is the secret of this capability? It is the opposition of the speech pattern and the verse pattern. The two patterns are in fundamental agreement—never to contradict the pronunciation—but beyond that they oppose one another. Stevenson expresses it well in the phrase 'that opposition which is the life of verse'. In that phrase lies the secret of English verse. Again he says: 'We see the laws of prosody to have one common purpose: to keep alive the opposition of two schemes simultaneously followed: to keep them notably apart, though still coincident; and to balance them with such judicial nicety before the reader, that neither shall be unperceived and neither signally prevail.'

Why, to what end, do the laws of prosody have one common purpose? To the end of expressing things which cannot be expressed in prose, whether emotional or intellectual, and principally a fusing of these. Thought and feeling in the greatest poetry are unified into the expression of emotional experience.

Has this view any application to the liberties spoken of at the beginning of this note, the departure from the pattern by substitution and redundancy? It applies closely, for here too the emphasis of his meaning is the first consideration of the poet.

Athens, | <sup>U</sup> the eye | <sup>U</sup> of Grecce, | <sup>U</sup> mother | <sup>U</sup> of arts.

The verse pattern has trochaic substitution in the first and fourth feet and the speech pattern follows the verse pattern in every syllable.

We have given our hearts away, a sorrow did boone

The verse pattern has anapaestic substitution in the first two feet and again the speech pattern follows the verse pattern in every syllable. If these variations in the lines of good poets are studied, it will be found that verse and speech patterns always coincide. Thus these variations also may be associated not merely with linguistic necessity but with meaning.

They also enable us to see the second rule, of variety, in a new light. Variety is not merely an avoiding of monotony. It is the possibility of 'the sense variously drawn out from one Verse into another', and of the verses reflecting the sense. Variety becomes the liberty of the sound to echo the sense. A rigid iambic pentameter system must remain mechanical. Variety permits the expression of the visitation of the spirit to man. Form may come first as the bodiless music of the poem, or the subject may excite the poet and he seeks the one form in which this excitement can be expressed. Whichever comes first, the two must go together as one, always with that element of control which is in the nature of true liberty.

An example will explain this. Here is a sonnet by Wordsworth printed with scanning and speech patterns, the latter being on top:—

The world is too much with us; late and soon,

— ˘ ˘ — ˘ — — ˘ —  
 — ˘ ˘ — ˘ — — ˘ —  
 Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers:

— ˘ ˘ — ˘ — — ˘ —  
 — ˘ ˘ — ˘ — — ˘ —  
 Little we see in Nature that is ours:

˘ ˘ — ˘ ˘ — — ˘ — — ˘ —  
 ˘ ˘ — ˘ ˘ — — ˘ — — ˘ —  
 We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!

˘ ˘ — ˘ ˘ — — ˘ — — ˘ —  
 ˘ ˘ — ˘ ˘ — — ˘ — — ˘ —  
 This sea that bares her bosom to the moon;

˘ ˘ — ˘ ˘ — — ˘ — — ˘ —  
 ˘ ˘ — ˘ ˘ — — ˘ — — ˘ —  
 The winds that will be howling at all hours,

˘ ˘ — ˘ ˘ — — ˘ — — ˘ —  
 ˘ ˘ — ˘ ˘ — — ˘ — — ˘ —  
 And are up-gather'd now like sleeping flowers;

˘ ˘ — ˘ ˘ — — ˘ — — ˘ —  
 ˘ ˘ — ˘ ˘ — — ˘ — — ˘ —  
 For this, for everything, we are out of tune;

— — — — — — — ˘ — — ˘ —  
 — — — — — — — ˘ — — ˘ —  
 It moves us not.—Great God! I'd rather be

˘ ˘ — ˘ ˘ — — ˘ — — ˘ —  
 ˘ ˘ — ˘ ˘ — — ˘ — — ˘ —  
 A Pagan suckled in a creed outworn;

— — — — — — — ˘ — — ˘ —  
 — — — — — — — ˘ — — ˘ —  
 So might I, standing on this pleasant lea,

˘ ˘ — ˘ ˘ — — ˘ — — ˘ —  
 ˘ ˘ — ˘ ˘ — — ˘ — — ˘ —  
 Have glimpses that would make me less forlorn;

˘ ˘ — ˘ ˘ — — ˘ — — ˘ —  
 ˘ ˘ — ˘ ˘ — — ˘ — — ˘ —  
 Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea;

˘ ˘ — ˘ ˘ — — ˘ — — ˘ —  
 ˘ ˘ — ˘ ˘ — — ˘ — — ˘ —  
 Or hear old Triton blow his wreathed horn.

This sonnet is a remarkable piece of craftsmanship. It obeys all the rules, fourteen lines, octave and sestet, rhyming correctly; and every line an

iambic pentameter with the permitted variations. Yet within the rules it uses pause and emphasis to express irksomeness, dissatisfaction and disgust. After the magnificently heavy opening of the ninth line, 'It moves us not', which most readers will read as four emphatically stressed syllables, his indignation bursts into the extraordinary idea—as it was for Wordsworth and his time—which follows. First it bursts wrathfully, but the very picturing of the idea brings the glow of peace and contentment which is the essence of the final picture. All that is reflected and emphasized in the movement of the words *against* the scansion of them. It is a great example of 'that opposition which is the life of verse'.

It is the secret of English prosody that it lives by opposition, an opposition in which neither side will 'signally prevail'. On this depends the beauty of such lines by Shakespeare as

Bare ruined choirs, where late the sweet birds sang  
and

Let me not to the marriage of true minds  
Admit impediments.

and the great movement of the verses by Milton:

Blind Thamyris and blind Mæonides,  
And Tiresias and Phineus prophets old.  
Then feed on thoughts, that voluntary move  
Harmonious numbers; as the wakeful bird  
Sings darkling, and in shadiest covert hid  
Tunes her nocturnal note.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Paradise Lost*, III, 35–40.

## CHAPTER III

### THE BALLAD

IN the last chapter we discovered the ballad stanza; in this we shall discuss the ballad form. The ballad tells a story. There are many forms for telling stories in English verse, and every form tells them in its own way. The same story in blank verse, in tetrameter couplets and in ballad stanzas will be told quite differently. The poet therefore always chooses the form which will help him most to tell it in the way he wishes. The ballad way is lyrical. The lyric is short and emotional. So the ballad way is to choose those incidents from the story which will tell it briefly and gain emotional effect.

The ballad is not always written in the ballad stanza. Here is one by Scott which has all the essential of the ballad idea, but is written in a stanza pattern of 3,2,3,2 feet, rhyming as in the ballad stanza:

#### Proud Maisie

Proud Maisie is in the wood,  
Walking so early;  
Sweet Robin sits on the bush,  
Singing so rarely.

‘Tell me, thou bonny bird,  
When shall I marry me?’  
—‘When six braw gentlemen  
Kirkward shall carry ye.’

'Who makes the bridal bed,  
 Birdie, say truly?'  
 —'The grey-headed sexton  
 That delves the grave duly.  
 'The glow-worm o'er grave and stone  
 Shall light thee steady;  
 The owl from the steeple sing  
 Welcome, proud lady!'<sup>1</sup>

In its simplest form this story is: 'There was a proud young lady who never married.' The form takes the story and makes it thrill with emotion. It sets a scene. The girl is walking early in the woods and, seeing the friendly little bird, asks it the question which is nearest to her heart. The first answer seems strange to her, for a girl is not carried that way to church to be married. So she asks another question. The second answer makes it clear; she is going to church to her grave! She will go in the sadness of night, when the glow-worm and owl are about. Nothing more is said, for everything essential has been said; and the reader can imagine whatever else he will, that the bird flies off and the proud girl is left with sorrow in her heart, alone.

That is another part of the ballad way of telling a story; it expects the reader to use his imagination to fill out the gaps, and the verses stimulate him into being able to do so. Both in its form and its method, the ballad has that simplicity. It uses the method of stimulating emotional experience by the most rigorous economy of expression.

To understand how this form developed, we must study its history. The ballad is one of the oldest forms in English and it is much the oldest

<sup>1</sup> *O.B.V.* 556.

of those which are used today. It goes back hundreds of years to the days when it was sung by wandering professional singers in the feudal castles ('Listen, lords and ladies gay') and to the simple folk in the villages. The ballad singer told well-known stories: the joy of his singing was to revive in his hearers the emotion of the story. So only the emotional parts were told. After he had captured the feelings of his audience he never allowed them to fritter away by telling a dull part of a story. The emotional pitch, raised quickly, had to be sustained.

Ballad history goes back right beyond the Elizabethans, right back beyond Chaucer himself. We do not know who wrote them, we can only speculate as to whether they were written by one man or many. They spread all over England, Scotland and Ireland, and wherever they went local references began to appear in them. I have had ballads sung to me by old cottagers in the north of Ireland which I remembered as very old ballads in English and Scots; and in the Irish versions were references I had seen nowhere else to the Spanish Armada which battered itself to pieces in the north of Ireland in 1588.

The ballad form grew and flourished when English was a despised vernacular. Chaucer made fun of it in his parody *Sir Thopas*, just as Johnson mimicked it nearly four hundred years later. But in the best of the old ballads there is a freshness which has never appeared in English poetry again. They are the 'poetry of the youth of the world'; they are the first expression of those simple joys

and sorrows which are the eternal subjects in the long, unbroken history of English poetry.

The form is generous. It takes many kinds of stories; it suits itself to local conditions; and it is not strict in its metre. It allows different line lengths, and the ballad stanza, while normally of four lines, sometimes is of five, six, or even nine lines. The form was developed for simple, rapid narrative, charged with emotion. It must have this intention: and this intention satisfied, the writer had very considerable liberty in making his verses.

Scores of ballads were written about the fights on the Borders between England and Scotland. One of the most famous is the ballad of *Chevy Chace*, of which Sidney wrote: 'I never heard the old song of Percy and Douglas, that I found not my heart more moved than with a trumpet,' and of which Addison wrote that it was like the great epic poetry of Greece in the generosity of its heroes and the vivid pictures of the fighting, the flights of the arrows, the clangour of weapons. Others were about favourite heroes, of whom the greatest was Robin Hood, the bold but gentle outlaw. Many had religious subjects, and some had themes from ordinary lives, like *Proud Maisie*.

The ballad is very old; it is also full of vitality. Five hundred years after the old ballads were sung,<sup>1</sup> there was a great outburst of ballad writing among

<sup>1</sup> That puts the old ballads at 1300. But only two of them in their existing forms date before the Renaissance—*Chevy Chace* and *The Nut-Brown Maid*. The others were handed down orally for we do not know how long and committed to paper in the seventeenth century. The Robin Hood ballads appear to belong to the sixteenth century.

the Romantic poets; Wordsworth, Coleridge, Scott and others. What had happened meantime? Sidney in 1581 praised the ballad in the passage just quoted and Addison in 1712 devoted two of his *Spectator* essays to praising it. But all this while poets told stories in other ways and had other themes for their lyrics. The ballad was despised and neglected. It was left to village rhymesters. Interest was revived in 1765 when Bishop Percy published his *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*. This book is one of the marks of the reviving interest among poets and scholars in old and popular literature. Other collections followed. Scott himself collected the ballads of the Scottish Border and published them in 1802-3.

By that time the greatest ballad in English had been written, Coleridge's *Ancient Mariner*. Great poets were using the form again. But in this revival both writer and audience had changed. In the first place, there was only one writer and his poem was not changed by hundreds of years of oral transmission. Then the writer was an intellectual, conscious of the long history of the ballad form and of all that it is capable. Thirdly, the audience was no longer popular, but that select audience which reads poetry. The form might have become artificial, the writer dilettante. That these things did not happen is a tribute as much to the vitality of the form as to the writers.

Inevitably the revived ballad was different. Its early freshness could not return: its healthy contact with life and belief disappeared. The new

poet of the ballad had to command 'a willing suspension of disbelief'. The audience had to allow itself to be carried into scenes where everything was difficult to believe unless it willed to believe. What had seemed real to medieval man was strange to the nineteenth-century man.

It was Coleridge who spoke of this 'willing suspension of disbelief' and he asked for it more than any other ballad writer in his *Ancient Mariner*. In that poem we can see the old ballad living on and we can see new beauties which the old ballad never had. The study of it will give us the opportunity for another adventure in reading—comparing what a poet originally wrote with his final version. Coleridge published *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*<sup>1</sup> in 1798, and his final version is dated 1834. The poet added wonderfully to the beauty of his poem in these thirty-six years.

The first five stanzas give us the setting: the teller of the story seizes a passer-by for audience. In the sixth the story begins. The seventh stanza offers an example of the simplicity of the ballad which Johnson parodied in the stanza quoted in the first chapter:

The Sun came up upon the left,  
Out of the sea came he!  
And he shone bright, and on the right  
Went down into the sea.

In other words, a day passed, and they were sailing south. The setting thrusts in again on the story, but finally disappears when the story reopens with the glorious eleventh stanza:

<sup>1</sup> O.B.V. 562.

And now the STORM-BLAST came, and he  
Was tyrannous and strong:  
He struck with his o'ertaking wings,  
And chased us south along.

That is a magnificent personification. The idea of his strength is imitated in the verses by the first line sweeping into the second without a pause. And what a noble epithet invention that 'o'ertaking' is! We feel a personality dominating the sailors' world of sea and sky. The original version was:

Listen, Stranger! Storm and wind,  
A wind and tempest strong!  
For days and weeks it played us freaks—  
Like chaff we drove along.

How weak comparatively that impression is: notably in the weak and jingling third line, in which he uses middle rhyme (weeks—freaks), a tawdry ornament in this simple stanza, and uses for his rhyming vowel the thin ē sound. Compare that with the power and amplitude of

He struck with his o'ertaking wings.

In the next stanza he uses the latitude in the old ballads about adding extra lines. Thirty-six times in the ballad Coleridge lengthens the stanza, once to nine lines, eighteen times to six lines and seventeen times to five lines. Why? For that excellent artistic reason; economy. He can complete his picture in five or six lines, so he adds the extra line or two instead of another complete stanza. This sort of economy is the opposite of prolixity and tends to greater clearness and brilliance of effect. The six-line stanza was much used after

Coleridge, as we shall see. It must be remembered that this liberty with the stanza can only be taken in ballads.

The climax to the First Part is

. . . With my cross-bow  
I shot the Albatross.

Part Two begins with a stanza which reminds us of the opening of the story: it comes like the refrain which was familiar in the old ballad:

The Sun now rose upon the right:  
Out of the sea came he,  
Still hid in mist, and on the left  
Went down into the sea.

So now the ship is sailing northwards. Part Two tells how the ship is becalmed, and of the thirst that overcame the sailors in that parching heat. In three normal stanzas the poet paints with extraordinary vividness the heat and the thirst they endured:

All in a hot and copper sky,  
The bloody Sun, at noon,  
Right up above the mast did stand,  
No bigger than the Moon.

Day after day, day after day,  
We stuck, nor breath nor motion;  
As idle as a painted ship  
Upon a painted ocean.

Water, water, everywhere,  
And all the boards did shrink;  
Water, water, everywhere,  
Nor any drop to drink.

The opening stanza of Part Three is managed with great brilliance. Part Two gives the heat and

thirst: Part Three is concerned with the Phantom ship. The first stanza makes the transition:

There passed a weary time. Each throat  
Was parched, and glazed each eye.  
A weary time! a weary time!  
How glazed each weary eye!  
When looking westward, I beheld  
A something in the sky.

The first four lines are the very expression of hopeless weariness. The vowels and the pauses draw out the lines so that they reflect the mood absolutely. Now the first version of this stanza was :

I saw a something in the sky  
No bigger than my fist;  
At first it seem'd a little speck  
And then it seem'd a mist:  
It moved and moved, and took at last  
A certain shape, I wist.

The hissing sounds in that stanza are very ugly, and there is no poetical reason for them. The rhyming syllable three times repeated is most unpleasant. In the final version the idea of that stanza is conveyed in a four-line stanza and the offending sounds are removed. The final version gives the horror of time passing slowly in great pain, and then the sudden return to interest outside the experience of pain. Prosodically and psychologically it is a masterly revision.

The nine-line stanza of this part is made 443443443. The fours are couplets and the threes rhyme together, to make the stanza coherent. Each three lines offers a complete picture, but pictures so closely associated that they fade into one another. A stanza so unique in its form will

be expected to mark a crisis in the poem—Life-in-Death has just won the throw of the dice, so the Mariner will not die. But his shipmates drop dead around him.

Part Four tells how the presence of his dead shipmates lay heavily upon his spirit; then again at the end a turn in the story comes; he is able to bless a beautiful thing and the Albatross falls from his neck and disappears.

Part Five is a contrast to Part Three. Part Three is a description of motionlessness, while this Part is a most wonderful description of movement. The whole scene moves, the ship moves, even the dead move to perform the duties they had when living. Another emendation may be remarked upon:

The stars danced on between.  
to

The wan stars danced between.

The repetition of the long 'a' sound in the second, third and fourth syllables is masterly. Here is the final version of the stanza:

The upper air burst into life;  
And a hundred fire-flags sheen;  
To and fro they were hurried about!  
And to and fro, and in and out,  
The wan stars danced between.

The first four lines are concerned with the speed of the storm: then in the last we see through the clouds to the untroubled stars, and catch a glimpse beyond the fury of the storm of their unalterable serenity. This has been done by changing a perfectly normal line to a beautifully abnormal

one: all the poet does is to score out 'on' and replace it earlier in the line with 'wan'. That gives three long 'a' sounds, for supported by similar sounds, the vowel of 'stars' receives a stress. A little management of the prosody miraculously helps the meaning.

Part Six describes the breaking of the spell and the ship's return. Part Seven concludes the poem, rounding off every detail to a proper conclusion; even pious sentiments are added, in the old tradition of stressing the moral of the story. We may study one more emendation. The fifth stanza reads:

Brown skeletons of leaves that lag  
My forest-brook along;  
When the ivy-tod is heavy with snow,  
And the owlet whoops to the wolf below,  
That eats the she-wolf's young.

Originally, the first line read:

The skeletons of leaves that lag

Firstly, this is the only place in the poem where a sentence runs on from a previous stanza. Lengthening the first syllable gives that sense of pause which is otherwise lacking between the stanzas. Lengthening that syllable also helps the sense—'lagging'. It gives greater effect to the following 'I' sounds which reflect the sense.

It is the accumulation of these little things which makes the total impression. And the *Ancient Mariner* is gloriously effective in lifting the reader out of himself and into the mind of the narrator. While reading this poem we feel and see with the Mariner. Literature is the experience of entering

other minds and seeing their worlds: there are few experiences in literature more strange and yet more real than reading the *Ancient Mariner*.

The *Ancient Mariner* was the first of the great literary ballads of the Romantic poets. Twenty years later Keats wrote his *La Belle Dame sans Merci*:

O what can ail thee, knight-at-arms,  
Alone and palely loitering?  
The sedge is wither'd from the lake,  
And no birds sing.<sup>1</sup>

Keats has changed the stanza form: instead of 4343 it is 4442. What is the effect of this lengthening of the second and shortening of the fourth line? Following three four-foot lines the shortness of the last is emphasized; the poet emphasizes with the help of this short line the empty silence of an empty day. The redistribution of the feet is admirably successful for this subject. Notice that the quality of the stanza is not lost: it still has the power of reflecting sadly stories 'of far unhappy things'. Lingering sadness is instinct in Keats' pattern. No one has presumed to imitate this stanza experiment.

Let us study another modelling of the old pattern. Remember that these studies imply that the form has a definite effect upon the subject. That implication is the great argument for the study of prosody, and these nineteenth-century variations on the ballad stanza argue eloquently.

Rossetti in his *Blessèd Damozel* uses the six-line variation in the *Ancient Mariner*, 434343, rhyming on the threes.

<sup>1</sup> O.B.V. 640.

The blessed Damozel lean'd out  
 From the gold bar of Heav'n:  
 Her blue grave eyes were deeper much  
 Than a deep water, even.  
 She had three lilies in her hand,  
 And the stars in her hair were seven.  
 Her robe, ungirt from clasp to hem,  
 No wrought flowers did adorn,  
 But a white rose of Mary's gift  
 On the neck meetly worn;  
 And her hair, lying down her back,  
 Was yellow like ripe corn.<sup>1</sup>

It may be difficult to find the form there with so much substitution—the only 'three' line anything like normal is the last, and the two last 'fours' are abnormal. But the form is there and serves its subject. The subject is really the beauty of the Damozel, and the poem is a Pre-Raphaelite picture. But the poem gives the thoughts which a picture leaves us to guess. She is waiting for her lover, hoping that when he comes they will spend their time together as they did on earth:

'Yea, verily; when he is come  
 We will do thus and thus:  
 Till this my vigil seem quite strange  
 And almost fabulous;  
 We two will live at once, one life;  
 And peace shall be with us.'

What difference do the additional lines make? In the first place, the stanza is much more of a unit and separate. The ballad stanza was originally printed as a couplet of seven-foot lines, and couplets tend to run on from one to the next. This poem is not a story: it is a series of pictures

<sup>1</sup> *O.B.V.* 779.

and reflections, expressing hope long drawn out. The ballad stanzas are at their best with a story progressing rapidly through them.

To support this idea here is another example of the six-line stanza. Oscar Wilde's *Ballad of Reading Gaol* also has little of story in it and much of picture and reflection—dreadful picturing and morbid reflection. Rossetti displays consummate mastery of pensive melody and Wilde with his macabre idea makes stanzas that are often no better than the doggerel of realism, but still the form exerts its power :

At last I saw the shadowed bars,  
    Like a lattice wrought in lead,  
Move right across the whitewashed wall  
    That faced my three-plank bed,  
And I knew that somewhere in the world  
    God's dreadful dawn was red.

The epithet in the last line has a journalistic vulgarity about it, but the picture is clear and complete. Three stanzas later the form is used for reflection, expressing the hopelessness of prisoners with distressing power :

We were as men who through a fen  
    Of filthy darkness grope:  
We did not dare to breathe a prayer,  
    Or to give our anguish scope:  
Something was dead in each of us,  
    And what was dead was Hope.

It would be difficult to end a chapter on the ballad without some reference to the work of A. E. Housman. In his poems the power of the old form is always present, for the telling of stories, for description and for reflection. He

shows us that the old form can express the thoughts of today. It is still full of life, still ready to help the poet with unabated power.

We can go on now to study the greater forms in English poetry, prepared for our study with the idea that a great form is always ready to help the poet. If he chooses his form well, it will assist him wonderfully, so that form and idea grow together into that kind of expression we call poetry.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE STANZA

IN prosody the stanza is the next higher unit to the line, and may be described as an arrangement of lines in verse in which the structure is usually marked by rhyme. We have already seen in considering the ballad that the stanza is form, by that meaning that it has a definite effect upon the poet's expression. In this chapter we shall examine the prosodic effect of some of the common stanzas in English verse.

Using the definition just offered in its widest sense, the couplet ranks as a stanza. The ordinary couplets in English verse are made of two four-foot or five-foot lines. These couplets can be used individually or can run on in very close connexion with one another (see Chapter VII). Couplets of longer lines are more likely to remain individual. We have just seen that the ballad stanza was originally a couplet of two seven-foot lines; and the ~~ballad stanza~~ as used in the *Ancient Mariner* is a very individual unit. The following example from Tennyson's *Locksley Hall* shows the same individuality in a couplet of eight-foot lines. To stress this quality Tennyson printed them with spaces between each:

Many a night from yonder ivied casement, ere I went  
to rest,  
Did I look on great Orion sloping slowly to the West.

Many a night I saw the Pleiads, rising thro' the mellow shade,  
 Glitter like a swarm of fire-flies tangled in a silver braid.  
 Here about the beach I wander'd, nourishing a youth sublime  
 With the fairy tales of science, and the long result of Time;  
 When the centuries behind me like a fruitful land reposed;  
 When I clung to all the present for the promise that it closed;  
 When I dipt into the future far as mortal eye could see;  
 Saw the Vision of the world, and all the wonder that would be.

This example shows the stanza as a sensory and sensuous unit; a prosodic form fulfilling a definite object. These lines could be printed as tetrameter quatrains rhyming - *a - a*: but their splendour would be diminished. The subject embraces all time, and the long sweep of the lines assists the expression of it. Each couplet expresses a complete picture or idea, and every picture or idea has in it the grave emotion which is called forth by the contemplation of the immensities of space and time. Both idea and emotion are assisted by the stanza.

There is a three-line stanza adopted from the Italian and retaining its Italian name, *terza rima*, with which a few English poets like Shelley and Byron have secured a particular effect.

If I were a dead leaf thou mightest bear;  
 If I were a swift cloud to fly with thee;  
 A wave to pant beneath thy power, and share

The impulse of thy strength, only less free  
 Than thou, O uncontrollable! if even  
 I were as in my boyhood, and could be

The comrade of thy wanderings over heaven,  
 As then, when to outstrip thy skiey speed  
 Scarce seem'd a vision—I would ne'er have striven

As thus with thee in prayer in my sore need.  
 O! lift me as a wave, a leaf, a cloud!  
 I fall upon the thorns of life! I bleed!

A heavy weight of hours has chain'd and bow'd  
 One too like thee—tameless, and swift, and proud.<sup>1</sup>

Shelley's *Triumph of Life* would offer even better examples of the characteristic of this terza rima stanza to proceed from one stanza to another, trailing an endless glory of thought and feeling. But this example shows the poet's device for restraining that movement by the introduction of a couplet to round the terza rima stanza into a longer stanza unit. Notice how the rhymes in the terza rima reflect the nature of the stanza to run on into the next—the unrhymed middle line supplying the rhyme in the following stanza.

We have already studied some quatrains—four-line stanzas—and seen how the ballad stanza tells a story, the quatrain of tetrameters is more reflective, and the quatrain of pentameters still more seriously reflective. Tennyson, for his *In Memoriam*, invented a quatrain suitable for his serious meditations:

Tonight the winds begin to rise  
 And roar from yonder dropping day:  
 The last red leaf is whirl'd away,  
 The rooks are blown about the skies;<sup>2</sup>

The stanzas are complete but not isolated. A single stanza gives a picture but the series of

<sup>1</sup> O.B.V. 617.

<sup>2</sup> *English Parnassus*, p. 555.

stanzas impress the reader with the heavy mood of sorrowing reflection which has overtaken the poet. This stanza would not do for narrative, which requires rapidity and a forward movement. It is largely the arrangement of the rhymes which makes the effect: the fourth line answers the first, thus enclosing the stanza but not halting it. For contrast, take

On Linden, when the sun was low,  
All bloodless lay the untrodden snow,  
And dark as winter was the flow  
Of Iser, rolling rapidly.<sup>1</sup>

The rhyme arrangement and the shorter final line make this stanza a vehicle for rapid narrative.

The next important stanza to consider is the Chaucerian stanza or Rhyme-Royal. Chaucer used it frequently and the alternative name comes from its use by a king of Scotland.

Her letter now is seal'd and on it writ  
'At Ardea to my lord, with more than haste.'  
The post attends, and she delivers it,  
Charging the sour-fac'd groom to hie as fast  
As lagging fowls before the northern blast.  
Speed more than speed but dull and slow she deems:  
Extremity still urgeth such extremes.<sup>2</sup>

The stanza is used for narrative by story-telling poets from Chaucer to Morris. Seven pentameters allow ample development within the stanza. The rhyming scheme cleverly holds the lines together and the double couplet gives it speed.

In long stanzas couplets are used to do two things: either to speed the stanza or to round it

<sup>1</sup> CAMPBELL, *Hohenlinden*.

<sup>2</sup> SHAKESPEARE, *The Rape of Lucrece*, 1331-7.

off. In the next stanza it rounds it off. Coming after the original rhymes (*ababab*) with a new rhyme it has a special rounding effect. The result of the structure is that the content is frequently six lines story and two lines acid comment.

'There is a tide in the affairs of men,  
Which, taken at the flood,'—you know the rest,  
And most of us have found it now and then:  
At least we think so, though but few have guess'd  
The moment, till too late to come again.  
But no doubt everything is for the best—  
Of which the surest sign is in the end:  
When things are at the worst they sometimes mend.<sup>1</sup>

This stanza is known by its Italian name, *ottava rima*, which means 'eight rhymes'. In English as in Italian it is used for pure romantic narrative and (as in *Don Juan*) for burlesque and mock heroic.

It was a vision.—In the drowsy gloom,  
The dull of midnight, at her couch's foot  
Lorenzo stood, and wept: the forest tomb  
Had marr'd his glossy hair which once could shoot  
Lustre into the sun, and put cold doom  
Upon his lips, and taken the soft lute  
From his lorn voice, and past his loamed ears  
Had made a miry channel for his tears.<sup>2</sup>

Keats in this poem achieves romantic narrative, but there is no doubt that the form naturally inclines towards hilarious burlesque. The interwoven rhymes of the first six lines contrast too strongly with the final couplet for perfect smoothness of narrative. But the final couplets in *Don Juan* are delicious and take the fullest advantage of the stanza structure.

<sup>1</sup> BYRON, *Don Juan*, VI, 1.

<sup>2</sup> KEATS, *Isabella*, xxxv.

One more stanza requires our attention, the Spenserian stanza, which takes its name from its inventor:

By this the Northern wagoner had set  
 His sevenfold team behind the steadfast star,  
**T**hat was in ocean waves yet never wet,  
 But firm is fixt, and sendeth light from far  
 To all that in the wide deep wand'ring are:  
**A**nd cheerful Chaanticlere with his note shrill  
 Had warnéd once, that Phœbus' fiery car  
 In haste was climbing up the Eastern hill,  
 Full envious that night so long his room did fill.<sup>1</sup>

This is a completely different stanza organization, as the rhyme scheme itself shows—*ababbcbcc*. The first couplet frequently but by no means invariably makes or marks a pause, and the final couplet does not have the same effect as in the ottava rima because of the lengthened final line. It was an apt invention for the poet's subject, which was *panoramic* rather than *narrative*. Spenser was one of the greatest composers of word music in English poetry, and his stanza gave him a perfect form for his slow, soothing cadences. Many poets have used it since; Thomson and Byron, Keats and Tennyson, and none with more success than Keats who found it a fitting vehicle for his rich, luxuriant imagination.

These are the more important stanza forms in English poetry. The student should now be able to analyse the form of the great variety of stanzas used by lyric writers and to work out for himself how the form adopted by the poet helps the expression of his subject and mood.

<sup>1</sup> SPENSER, *The Faerie Queene*, I, ii, 1.

## CHAPTER V

### THE SONNET

THE sonnet is the most popular arrangement of lines in stanza form in European literature. It is a fourteen-line stanza in which each literature uses its common long line, so that in English the form is fourteen iambic pentameters. Two forms of sonnet have generally been used in English, while poets have persistently experimented unsuccessfully with others. In this chapter the two forms are discussed, first the Italian form and then the English form, which is commonly called the Shakespearean sonnet because it was so greatly used by that poet.

The original sonnet form, invented in Italy and introduced to England by Wyatt in the sixteenth century, is built in two parts, the break coming at the end of the eighth line. The parts are called octave and sestet from the Italian words for the number of lines in each. As always in poetry thought and form go together: in the octave the subject is stated; in the sestet it is reflected upon. This sonnet of Keats is a good example. In the octave he tells us he has read a great deal of poetry but had not read Homer till he came across Chapman's translation. In the sestet he describes his sensations on reading it.

Much have I travell'd in the realms of gold,  
 And many goodly states and kingdoms seen,  
 Round many western islands have I been  
 Which bards in fealty to Apollo hold.  
 Oft of one wide expanse had I been told  
 That deep-brow'd Homer ruled as his demesne:  
 Yet did I never breathe its pure serene  
 Till I heard Chapman speak out loud and bold:  
 Then felt I like some watcher of the skies  
 When a new planet swims into his ken;  
 Or like stout Cortez, when with eagle eyes  
 He stared at the Pacific—and all his men  
 Look'd at each other with a wild surmise—  
 Silent, upon a peak in Darien.<sup>1</sup>

In this poem there is what Wordsworth called 'that pervading sense of intense unity in which the excellence of the Sonnet has always seemed to me to consist'. The two sides of that unity, expression and reflection, which was the first fashion of the sonnet, are clearly marked in the form. Notice how the rhyming scheme at once assists the unity of the parts and emphasizes the turning of the mood. In this pattern the octave always rhymes *abba abba*, while liberties were allowed in the sestet.

But it is typical that English poets should break from tradition to suit their poetic purposes. Here is a glorious example from Milton in which the pattern is followed but the turn of thought only comes in the second foot of the tenth line:

Avenge O Lord thy slaughtered saints, whose bones  
 Lie scatter'd on the Alpine mountains cold;  
 Even them who kept thy truth so pure of old  
 When all our fathers worshipped stocks and stones,  
 Forget not: in thy book record their groans

<sup>1</sup> *O.B.V.* 641.

Who were thy sheep, and in their ancient fold  
 Slain by the bloody Piedmontese, that rolled  
 Mother with infant down the rocks. Their moans  
 The vales redoubled to the hills, and they  
 To heaven. Their martyred blood and ashes sow  
 O'er all the Italian fields, where still doth sway  
 The triple Tyrant; that from these may grow  
 A hundredfold, who, having learned thy way,  
 Early may fly the Babylonian woe.

The pattern there is exactly that of Keats' sonnet just quoted. The next example offers a variation in the sestet (*cddece*). It is by Wordsworth who, of all the great English masters of the sonnet, owed most to the form—because he could not say too much (as he was inclined to do) in fourteen lines.

Milton! thou shouldst be living at this hour:  
 England hath need of thee: she is a fen  
 Of stagnant waters: altar, sword, and pen,  
 Fireside, the heroic wealth of hall and bower,  
 Have forfeited their ancient English dower  
 Of inward happiness. We are selfish men;  
 O raise us up, return to us again,  
 And give us manners, virtue, freedom, power!  
 Thy soul was like a Star, and dwelt apart;  
 Thou hadst a voice whose sound was like the sea:  
 Pure as the naked heavens, majestic, free,  
 So didst thou travel on life's common way,  
 In cheerful godliness; and yet thy heart  
 The lowliest duties on herself did lay.<sup>1</sup>

The octave is a great difficulty in English, for finding rhymes is not an easy thing.<sup>2</sup> So of

<sup>1</sup> *O.B.V.* 538.

<sup>2</sup> As Keats noted in his experimental sonnet:—

If by dull rhymes our English must be chain'd,  
 And, like Andromeda, the Sonnet sweet  
 Fetter'd, in spite of pain'd loveliness,  
 Let us find out, if we must be constrain'd,  
 Sandals more interwoven and complete  
 To fit the naked foot of Poesy. . .

necessity a new rhyme pattern was evolved almost as soon as the sonnet was introduced. Here is a superb sonnet to serve as example of the pattern:

Since there's no help, come let us kiss and part—  
Nay, I have done, you get no more of me;  
And I am glad, yea, glad with all my heart,  
That thus so cleanly I myself can free;  
Shake hands for ever, cancel all our vows,  
And when we meet at any time again,  
Be it not seen in either of our brows  
That we one jot of former love retain.  
Now at the last gasp of Love's latest breath,  
When, his pulse failing, Passion speechless lies,  
When Faith is kneeling by his bed of death,  
And Innocence is closing up his eyes,  
—Now if thou wouldest, when all have given him over,  
From death to life thou might'st him yet recover.<sup>1</sup>

In this sonnet the logical distinction between octave and sestet is maintained, but there is another pausing, which is typical of the pattern, before the last couplet. All is finished apparently, but no, one word from the lover and love lives again. This couplet effect at the end is just the same as we discussed in the last chapter, and here again it has the same power and the same striking beauty. It is certainly the distinctive thing in the English pattern of sonnet, which quite often ignores the pause or turn between octave and sestet. The completeness of the couplet invites a summing up of the matter in the last two lines, or a sudden dramatic turn in the mood.

In Shakespeare's 'How like a winter hath my absence been' there are three pictures, one in each quatrain, and the final couplet links them all,

<sup>1</sup> O.B.V. 127.

concludes them all, while depending on them for its effect.

The turn after the eighth line is noticeable frequently in this 'Shakespeare' pattern. There is often a re-beginning, a new zest, in the ninth line—as in the sonnet 'From you I have been absent in the Spring', of which the ninth and tenth lines are

Nor did I wonder at the Lily's white  
Or praise the deep vermilion in the Rose.

Again, in 'To me, fair friend'<sup>1</sup> there is a sudden saddening from

Three April perfumes in three hot Junes burned  
Since first I saw you fresh, which yet are green.

to

Ah! yet doth beauty, like a dial-hand,  
Steal from his figure, and no pace perceived.

The sonnet will express great variety of mood. This is because it is written in the great English line for excited expression in any mood—the iambic pentameter. In the hands of Milton and Donne the 'Thing became a trumpet', with Shakespeare it acquired its greatest intensity, the fourteen lines fusing together into one poetic light, while at the other extreme in Wordsworth's *Calais Beach* and *Westminster Bridge* the form becomes as quiet as an English landscape painting.

Finally, the great weakness of the Shakespeare model must be noted. The couplet can have a very fine effect, but unless it has, it is likely to appear an artificial addition; a prosaic reflection filling up the two necessary lines. Keats, in the

<sup>1</sup> *O.B.V.* 169.

letter in which he writes the sonnet quoted in an earlier note, says: 'I have been endeavouring to discover a better Sonnet Stanza than we have. The legitimate (i.e. Italian) does not suit the language over well from the pouncing rhymes—the other appears too elegiac—and the couplet at the end of it has seldom a pleasing effect.' Here he states the great difficulties, though we may be loth to go as far as he does about the couplet. The effort to overcome these difficulties often appears in the imported form. At times one is tempted to hold that only three poets mastered the form with habitual ease, Shakespeare, who makes it a shock of emotion, Milton, the greatest master of form in English poetry, and Wordsworth, who depended on the form so much that he became its master. But the difficulties as expressed by Keats are evident right through the literature of the sonnet in English.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE ODE

BECAUSE poems so various in their forms are called 'ode' in English poetry, it is difficult to define the kind and be usefully accurate. Dryden writes a poem on Alexander's feast which he calls an ode: the stanzas are quite irregular. Gray writes a poem about the history of European poetry, and calls it an ode: the stanzas are as elaborate as Dryden's but they run in sets of three, the intricate pattern of each being repeated three times. Collins writes an ode on popular superstitions in the Highlands of Scotland: the stanzas are usually of seventeen lines with a final alexandrine. Then he writes an ode to Evening in which the stanzas consist of two iambic pentameters and two iambic trimeters and there are no rhymes at all. Shelley writes an ode to the West Wind in terza rima with a couplet to make a fourteen-line combination. Keats invents elaborate stanzas on an iambic pentameter basis with intricate rhymes for his odes. Bridges at the end of his *Later Poems* has a series of poems which he calls odes formed of simple lyric stanzas.

From this tangle we can extract something. The ode is usually a sustained lyric, because it is usually written in praise of someone or something: is often directly addressed to the person or object praised. From its various use we can limit certain

kinds. The ode, like the sonnet, is a form imported from other literatures; but there were different kinds to import. First of all there was the ode as written by Pindar, the Greek poet, about the Olympic Games. Pindar's stanzas seemed to be formless to the poets who imitated his kind of ode in the time of Cowley and Dryden. The formless stanzas seemed to reflect the poet's uncontrolled frenzy and ecstasy. Just about 1700 Congreve showed in his *Discourse on the Pindarique Ode* that Pindar's stanzas were anything but haphazard, being very intricate indeed. Of the two English kinds of Pindaric ode we shall examine Dryden's *Alexander's Feast* and Gray's *Progress of Poesy*.

Another source was Latin poetry, in which the ode was made of short stanzas regularly repeated. So Collins calls his beautiful Evening poem an ode:

Now air is hush'd save where the weak-eyed bat  
With short shrill shriek flits by on leather wing,  
Or where the beetle winds  
His small but sullen horn,<sup>1</sup>

Very near the Latin model, particularly in the drawing out of the sense from one stanza to another, is Marvell's *Horatian Ode upon Cromwell's return from Ireland* from which these are the most famous stanzas. They are about Charles I at his execution:

He nothing common did or mean  
Upon that memorable scene,  
But with his keener eye  
The axe's edge did try;

Nor call'd the Gods, with vulgar spite,  
 To vindicate his helpless right;  
 But bow'd his comely head  
 Down, as upon a bed.<sup>1</sup>

English poets evolved a long sustained stanza, regularly repeated, for their odes and as an example of that kind we shall examine the Autumn ode of Keats.

Dryden's *Alexander's Feast*<sup>2</sup> displays wonderful metrical virtuosity without a scrap of poetry. There is not one poetical flight, not one poetical image in the whole piece; and the story is vulgar. Yet we cannot withhold our admiration from the management of the verses. Dryden sets out to celebrate the power of music and to show how a clever musician can work on the moods of his audience. He describes how the musician Timotheus played upon that vulgar dinner party, and the verses reflect the moods he induces with admirable skill. In a drinking vein:

Bacchus, ever fair and young,  
 Drinking joys did first ordain;  
 Bacchus' blessings are a treasure,  
 Drinking is the soldier's pleasure:

Here the sensitive tetrameters run lightly on a trochaic measure: the foot and the line length give speed and lightness, while the missing final syllable in the first two lines adds to this effect.

Twenty lines later the mood is absolutely changed. The verses reflect consummately the disillusionment in Alexander's mind:

<sup>1</sup> O.B.V. 364.

<sup>2</sup> *English Parnassus*, p. 170.

With downcast looks the joyless victor sate,  
 Revolving in his alter'd soul  
 The various turns of Chance below;  
 And now and then a sigh he stole,  
 And tears began to flow.

The vowels are preponderatingly long and all the rhyming vowels are long 'o' sounds. The trisyllabic substitution in the third line reflects weariness, and the heavy-beating short last line reflects the relief of exhausted feeling.

A final example of this virtuosity. Timotheus calls on the victor to avenge the unburied dead in his army:

Revenge, revenge, Timotheus cries,  
 See the Furies arise!  
 See the snakes that they rear  
 How they hiss in their hair,  
 And the sparkles that flash from their eyes.

The swift anapæsts, the hissing 's' sounds, the 'h' and 'f' sounds that involve effort, all echo the violence of the shock that roused Alexander from the previous languishing mood.

Gray's *Progress of Poesy*,<sup>1</sup> our example of the Pindaric ode which was something like Pindar's work in form, has exactly as much poetry in it as Dryden's ode. The subject however is more worthy and permits Gray to offer compliments to his predecessors in the craft of verse.

The form calls for explanation. Pindar's odes were sung by a chorus which executed dance movements before an altar while it sang. During the first stanza the chorus moved round the altar

<sup>1</sup> *English Parnassus*, p. 241.

clockwise, during the second it returned, so the first and second stanzas were of the same length; in the third it was stationary. The dance was completed in these movements; so the Pindaric ode consists of sets of three stanzas. The Greek names for these stanzas are, Strophe, Antistrophe and Epode. If you examine *The Progress of Poesy* you will find this to be the metrical pattern:

1. Strophe	2. Antistrophe	3. Epode
<i>abbaccddee ff</i> 45+5+545446	<i>same as strophe</i>	<i>aabbaccdedef gfg hh</i> 444344444+555556

Looking at that scheme, you will conclude from our previous observations on line lengths that the strophe and antistrophe will be slow and grave—with that typical ending to a weighty stanza, the long alexandrine. But the epode, with so many of these sensitive 'fours', grouped by the rhymes, should be exciting.

The most interesting strophe is the second:

Man's feeble race what ills await,  
Labour, and penury, the racks of pain,  
Disease, and sorrow's weeping train,  
And death, sad refuge from the storms of fate!  
The fond complaint, my song, disprove,  
And justify the laws of Jove.  
Say, has he giv'n in vain the heav'nly Muse?  
Night, and all her sickly dews,  
Her spectres wan, and birds of boding cry,  
He gives to range the dreary sky:  
Till down the eastern cliffs afar  
Hyperion's march they spy, and glitt'ring shafts of war.

The excellent argument is that poetry makes life bearable; the early lines, from one who led such an easy agreeable life, are surprisingly dreadful;

the picture of a stormy evening is vivid, but surely the dispelling sun might have been more clearly described. But there is eighteenth-century weight and power in the opening with the long-vowelled tetrameters; the wan poetry of the mid-century appears later, and the last two lines are formed to reflect the sun's dispelling force.

The most interesting antistrophe is that in which the work of Milton and Dryden is described:

Nor second he, that rode sublime  
Upon the seraph-wings of ecstasy,  
The secrets of th' abyss to spy.

He pass'd the flaming bounds of place and time:  
The living throne, the sapphire-blaze,  
Where angels tremble, while they gaze,  
He saw; but blasted with excess of light,  
Closed his eyes in endless night.  
Behold, where Dryden's less presumptuous car,  
Wide o'er the fields of glory bear  
Two coursers of ethereal race,  
With necks in thunder cloth'd, and long-resounding pace.

The prosodical interest of this stanza is the colour the tetrameters take from the pentameters. More than in the first stanza quoted these tetrameters are lengthened to accord with the longer line. Even the shortened line, the very lovely 'Closed his eyes in endless night', the shortening of which stresses the sense so aptly, is very slow, and as far removed as can be from the kind of seven we shall find in the next chapter. The Dryden description is 'less presumptuous' but there will never be a more apt description of Dryden's powerful couplet than Gray's hexameter. The first epode is an exquisite thing. Here the tetrameters have their natural way and the

pentameters following, instead of being interwoven with them, give the desired complete contrast:

Thee the voice, the dance, obey,  
 Temper'd to thy warbled lay.  
 O'er Idalia's velvet-green  
 The rosy-crownèd Loves are seen  
 On Cytherea's day  
 With antic Sports, and blue-eyed Pleasures,  
 Frisking light in frolic measures;  
 Now pursuing, now retreating,  
 Now in circling troops they meet:  
 To brisk notes in cadence beating  
 Glance their many-twinkling feet.  
 Slow melting strains their Queen's approach declares:  
 Where'er she turns the Graces homage pay.  
 With arms sublime, that float upon the air,  
 In gliding state she wins her easy way:  
 O'er her warm cheek, and rising bosom, move  
 The bloom of young desire, and purple light of love.

Here is a return of the 'brisk' joy of the seven and eight and the contrast arranged by the 'Slōw mēlting strāins thēir Quēen's' is metrically perfect. The exotic languor of the 'o' and 'u' sounds in 'move The bloom of young desire, and purple light of love' is, from Gray, unexpectedly delicious.

But the ode gives us great poetry too, and it is natural to use as example that perfectly conceived and executed piece, Keats' *To Autumn*. Writing of the six great odes of Keats Bridges says: 'If we rank them merely according to perfection of workmanship, the one that was last written, that is, *The Ode to Autumn*, will claim the highest place; and unless it be objected as a slight blemish

that the words “Think not of them” in the second line of the third stanza are somewhat awkwardly addressed to a personification of Autumn, I do not know that any sort of fault can be found in it.’

Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness!  
 Close bosom-friend of the maturing sun;  
 Conspiring with him how to load and bless  
 With fruit the vines that round the thatch-eaves run;  
 To bend with apples the moss'd cottage-trees,  
 And fill all fruit with ripeness to the core;  
 To swell the gourd, and plump the hazel shells  
 With a sweet kernel; to set budding more,  
 And still more, later flowers for the bees,  
 Until they think warm days will never cease,  
 For Summer has o'er-brimm'd their clammy cells.

Who hath not seen thee oft amid thy store?  
 Sometimes whoever seeks abroad may find  
 Thee sitting careless on a granary floor,  
 Thy hair soft-lifted by the winnowing wind,  
 Or on a half-reap'd furrow sound asleep,  
 Drowsed with the fume of poppies, while thy hook  
 Spares the next swath and all its twinèd flowers;  
 And sometimes like a gleaner thou dost keep  
 Steady thy laden head across a brook;  
 Or by a cider-press, with patient look,  
 Thou watchest the last oozings hours by hours.

Where are the songs of Spring? Ay, where are they?  
 Think not of them, thou hast thy music too,—  
 While barrèd clouds bloom the soft-dying day,  
 And touch the stubble-plains with rosy hue;  
 Then in a wailful choir the small gnats mourn  
 Among the river sallows, borne aloft  
 Or sinking as the light wind lives or dies;  
 And full-grown lambs loud bleat from hilly bourn;  
 Hedge-crickets sing; and now with treble soft  
 The redbreast whistles from a garden-croft;  
 And gathering swallows twitter in the skies.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> O.B.V. 634.

The first stanza gives us a physical satisfaction in the mellow fruitfulness of Autumn: the second personifies the season, and the third is more spiritualized, reviving the sounds that give us the essence of the feeling we know as Autumn. The rhymes, fittingly, are luxuriously intertwined. The first four lines are plain *abab* and in each stanza each of these lines is a unit: rich and full as Spenser and Marlowe made them, and like them, pausing and breaking forth anew. In the second and third lines of the middle stanza there is enjambment, but the emphatic first syllable of the third line stresses the individuality of the lines even there. Thereafter, the rhymes are involved and the lines enjamb luxuriously with them, and the reader is driven on (probably unconsciously) from the rhyme of the seventh line waiting for the echo which only comes on the last word of the stanza. After the simply rhymed opening in which the approach to the subject is set forth, three new rhymes come (*cde*), then an answer to *c*, two echoes of *d* and at last the satisfaction of an answer to *e*. In the *Nightingale*, *Grecian Urn* and *Melancholy*, the same *abab* opening is used, but thereafter there is a simple repetition, *cde, cde* or *cde, dce*. In the *Nightingale* the familiar variation of trimeter with pentameter is used in the second *c* rhyme. The extra line in the *Autumn* and the longer wait for the satisfaction of rhyme is an admirable invention for the subject-matter.

The ode is of special interest to the prosodist, for its splendour depends—very often obviously—on technical effects. It is a misfortune that two

of the odes we have examined are without poetry: for great poetry has been added to English by the ode. This can be appreciated only by those who take the trouble to understand how the effects have been gained, and is an argument for the study of prosody.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE IAMBIC TETRAMETER COUPLET

THE iambic tetrameter couplet has given us some of the most delightful poetry in English. It consists of two lines of four iambs, rhyming. Unsuitable for the most serious purposes, it gives us light, speedy narrative, delicate lyric, and a great deal of amusing intellectual trifling. The first example is from Swift, who used the tetrameter over a wider range of subjects and moods than anyone else. From many poets we have more poetical tetrameters but within his range Swift is one of the great masters of the form.

Here are some biting couplets from his poem *The Furniture of a Woman's Mind*:

A set of phrases learn't by rote;  
A passion for a scarlet coat;  
When at a play to laugh, or cry,  
Yet cannot tell the reason why:  
Never to hold her tongue a minute;  
While all she prates has nothing in it.<sup>1</sup>  
Whole hours can with a coxcomb sit,  
And take his nonsense all for wit:  
Her learning mounts to read a song,  
But, half the words pronouncing wrong;  
Has ev'ry repartee in store,  
She spoke ten thousand times before.  
Can ready compliments supply  
On all occasions, cut and dry.

<sup>1</sup> Feminine ending, double rhyme. See Glossary.

The iambic beat is evident in every foot: it would be difficult to find a simpler use of the form. Every couplet is separate, and each 'tells'. They are very cruel. Now let us take an example from Swift in another mood, from the famous birthday verses to Stella:

This day then, let us not be told,  
That you are sick, and I grown old,  
Nor think on our approaching ills,  
And talk of spectacles and pills;  
Tomorrow will be time enough  
To hear such mortifying stuff.

The verses are more kindly now and grow out of one another. There is not the pause between one cruel jab and another.

As an example of narrative, clear and speedy, here are lines from Swift's fairy poem, *Baucis and Philemon*:

It happened on a winter's night,  
As authors of the legend write,  
Two brother hermits, saints by trade,  
Taking their tour in masquerade,  
Disguised in tattered habits, went  
To a small village down in Kent;  
Where, in the stroller's canting strain,  
They begged from door to door in vain;  
Tried every tone might pity win,  
But not a soul would let them in.

Here we have the prosodic variety which we saw, when reading ballads, a sustained narrative requires. The beginning of the third line is slowed up by 'Two brōther hērmits'. The fourth has trochaic substitution so that the stresses come on the alliterating 'Tāking their tōur', and in the next we have enjambment, 'went To a small village'.

The narrative writer does not like individual couplets, but prefers them to join the larger unity of the paragraph.

A last example from Swift will show the full might of this couplet—the deepest notes of which the form is capable. These verses are taken from that terrible indictment of humanity *The Day of Judgement*:

While each pale sinner hangs his head,  
 Jove, nodding, shook the heav'ns, and said,  
 'Offending race of human kind,  
 By nature, reason, learning, blind;  
 You who thro' frailty step'd aside,  
 And you who never fell—*thro' pride*;  
 You who in different sects have shamm'd,  
 And come to see each other damn'd;  
 (So some folks told you, but they knew  
 No more of Jove's designs than you)  
 The world's mad business now is o'er,  
 And I resent these pranks no more.  
 I to such blockheads set my wit!  
 I damn such fools!—Go, go, you're bit.'

Here for once the tetrameter takes on the Olympian ease and power of Dryden's pentameters.

It seems surprising that we can turn to Milton for contrast to these 'organ notes', but we turn to the young, Elizabethan Milton for:

Come, and trip it as ye go  
 On the light fantastic toe,  
 And in thy right hand lead with thee,  
 The mountain nymph, sweet Liberty;  
 And if I give thee honour due,  
 Mirth, admit me of thy crew  
 To live with her, and live with thee,  
 In unprovèd pleasures free;  
 To hear the lark begin his flight,

And singing startle the dull night,  
From his watch-tower in the skies,  
Till the dappled dawn doth rise.<sup>1</sup>

The contrast is extraordinary. How is it gained? In the first two lines the first syllable is missing; it is the same trick that we found in the last chapter Gray used for speed in his ode. The missing syllable is the essence of the trick. Such lines are scanned:

^ — | ^ — | ^ — | ^ —  
Come | and trip | it as | you go

^ — | ^ — | ^ — | ^ —  
On | the light | fantas | tic toe,<sup>2</sup>

The effect also depends on the vowelling and an occasional movement of the stresses away from the pattern as in

^ — | ^ — | ^ — | ^ — | ^ — |  
And singing startle the dull night.

But such movements are rare, for the words must flutter on the pattern to ensure the desired effect, of dancing speed. We may test these conclusions by watching Milton securing an exactly opposite effect in *Il Penseroso*:

Come, but keep thy wonted state,  
With eev'n step, and musing gait,  
And looks commerçing with the skies,  
Thy rapt soul sitting in thine eyes:  
There held in holy passion still,  
Forget thy self to marble, till,  
With a sad leaden downward cast,  
Thou fix them on the earth as fast.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *O.B.V.* 318.

<sup>2</sup> Some prosodists say the syllable is missing at the end. This, however, would appear to imply that the movement is trochaic, which is not so.

<sup>3</sup> *O.B.V.* 319.

Here the only dropped syllable is in the first line, and (as Milton has spelt it) in the second, but the 'eev'n' takes so long to pronounce that the line is effectively slowed. When speaking the verses, look how many long syllables there are in :

Thy rapt soul sitting  
Forget thyself  
 With a sad leaden downward cast

No more adequate picture of the stillness of contemplation could be desired, and it is a technical triumph to fashion it in iambic tetrameters. It shows us how remarkably sensitive the form is, and how wide its range.

This use of it with a dropped syllable (the technical term is catalectic) must be noticed, for the metre is that of fairy poetry in English and its airy speed is delighted in by poets. It is sometimes called 'Sevens and Eights', a term we cannot accept happily as we have decided that the foot and not the syllable is the unit in English prosody. Here is an extension of it to 'Sevens and Nines' with the usual fairy subject. It is the song of the Fourth Spirit in the First Act of *Prometheus Unbound* by Shelley:

On a poet's lips I slept  
 Dreaming like a love-adept  
 In the sound his breathing kept;  
 Nor seeks nor finds he mortal blisses,  
 But feeds on the aërial kisses  
 Of shapes that haunt thought's wildernesses.  
 He will watch from dawn to gloom  
 The lake-reflected sun illume  
 The yellow bees in the ivy-bloom,

Nor heed nor see, what things they be;  
 But from these create he can  
 Forms more real than living man,  
 Nurslings of immortality!  
 One of these awakened me,  
 And I sped to succour thee.

These are not couplets, but the poem is so exquisite an example of the airy speed of the tetrameter in this syllable-short form that it is quoted here.

Returning to the normal iambic tetrameter, an example from Byron will show the nature of the verse when it is used for a sustained narrative subject. The lines are from the end of *The Prisoner of Chillon*:

And thus when they appeared at last,  
 And all my bonds aside were cast,  
 These heavy walls to me had grown  
 A hermitage—and all my own!  
 And half I felt as they were come  
 To tear me from a second home:  
 With spiders I had friendship made,  
 And watched them in their sullen trade,  
 Had seen the mice by moonlight play,  
 And why should I feel less than they?  
 We were all inmates of one place,  
 And I, the monarch of each race,  
 Had power to kill—yet, strange to tell!  
 In quiet we had learned to dwell;  
 My very chains and I grew friends,  
 So much a long communion tends  
 To make us what we are—even I  
 Regained my freedom with a sigh.<sup>1</sup>

That is effortless writing. The form never gets in the way: the speech remains as natural as

<sup>1</sup> *English Parnassus*, p. 434.

possible. Here we have the very nearly epithetless narrative which is natural in the iambic tetrameter couplet.

The wealth of fine work in this form is so great that quotation might well be endless. Here are two final examples of its sensitive grace: the first is from Henry King's *Exequy on his Wife*:

Thou wilt not wake  
 Till I thy fate shall overtake:  
 Till age, or grief, or sickness must  
 Marry my body to that dust  
 It so much loves; and fill the room  
 My heart keeps empty in thy tomb.  
 Stay for me there: I will not fail  
 To meet thee in that hollow vale.  
 And think not much of my delay:  
 I am already on the way,  
 And follow thee with all the speed  
 Desire can make, or sorrows breed.  
 Each minute is a short degree  
 And every hour a step towards thee. . . .<sup>1</sup>

In these lines the form is the body and the ideas the spirit of tenderness.

The second is from Keats' *The Eve of St Mark*, a poem which admirably shows the power of the form in the delicate craftsmanship of description:

Twice holy was the Sabbath bell:  
 The silent streets were crowded well  
 With staid and pious companies,  
 Warm from their fireside orat'ries;  
 And moving, with demurest air,  
 To evensong, and vesper prayer.  
 Each archèd porch, and entry low,  
 Was fill'd with patient folk and slow,  
 With whispers hush, and shuffling feet,  
 While play'd the organ loud and sweet.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *O.B.V.* 288.

<sup>2</sup> *English Parnassus*, p. 525.

All the illustrations have been chosen to illustrate the range of the form, its sensitiveness and its good nature. The poet may do all sorts of things to the lines, but the slightest thing he does has an immediate effect.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE HEROIC COUPLET

THE Heroic Couplet, which consists of two iambic pentameters rhyming, can be used formally in two ways. The couplets can be distinct from one another and they can run on. The first kind is called the 'closed' couplet, the second the 'enjambèd'.

The distinction was neither made nor understood until the seventeenth century, when, for reasons we shall see presently, the closed couplet was first evolved. By reaction from that rigid kind the Romantic poets for their very different poetical content evolved the enjambèd couplet. Before the fashion of the closed couplet, Chaucer and the Elizabethans closed and enjambèd their couplets as mood and metrical expediency dictated.

No other verse form in English is at once so old and various in its uses. It was first used in the 1390's by Chaucer in narrative verse that remains unsurpassed in grace and piquancy. It was next used by the Elizabethans; by Spenser for satire, by Marlowe for narrative. In the next century, as the Elizabethan energy disappeared, and the couplet became slipshod and formless, poets evolved many rules to rescue it from decay. Dryden was the first great master in this reformed couplet and he attributes the reform to his master Waller. The supreme master of the closed couplet was Pope.

As this closed couplet is the easier to study we shall begin with an example from his work. The virtues of this couplet are admirably stated by Lytton Strachey—‘regular, balanced, antithetical, simple, clear and exact’. They were regular as they liked the verse-beat and the pronunciation to go absolutely together; balanced and antithetic, as they liked to pause at the end of the first line and then balance that line with the second in sound. The sense was very often antithetic too, the second line expressing a consequence of or contrast to the sense of the first.

The following lines offer examples of these fashions. The lines are themselves a statement of the rules they observe and a criticism of less exact ways of writing :

But most by numbers judge a poet's song,  
And smooth or rough, with them, is right or wrong;  
In the bright Muse tho' thousand charms conspire,  
Her voice is all these tuneful fools admire;  
Who haunt Parnassus but to please their ear,  
Not mend their minds; as some to church repair,  
Not for the doctrine, but the music there.  
These equal syllables alone require,  
Tho' oft the ear the open vowels tire;  
While expletives their feeble aid do join;  
And ten low words oft creep in one dull line;  
While they ring round the same unvaried chimes,  
With sure returns of still-expected rhymes.  
Where'er you find ‘the cooling western breeze’,  
In the next line, it ‘whispers thro’ the trees’;  
If crystal streams ‘with pleasing murmurs creep’,  
The reader’s threaten’d (not in vain) with ‘sleep’.  
Then, at the last, and only couplet fraught  
With some unmeaning thing they call a thought,  
A needless Alexandrine ends the song,  
That, like a wounded snake, drags its slow length along.

Leave such to tune their own dull rhymes, and know  
 What's roundly smooth, or languishingly slow;  
 And praise the easy vigour of a line,  
 Where Denham's strength, and Waller's sweetness join.  
 True ease in writing comes from art, not chance,  
 As those move easiest who have learn'd to dance.  
 'Tis not enough no harshness gives offence,  
 The sound must seem an echo to the sense.  
 Soft is the strain when Zephyr gently blows,  
 And the smooth stream in smoother numbers flows;  
 But when loud surges lash the sounding shore,  
 The hoarse, rough verse should like the torrent roar.  
 When Ajax strives, some rock's vast weight to throw,  
 The line too labours, and the words move slow;  
 Not so, when swift Camilla scours the plain,  
 Flies o'er th' unbending corn, and skims along the main.  
 Hear how Timotheus' various lays surprise,  
 And bid alternate passions fall and rise!  
 While, at each change, the son of Libyan Jove  
 Now burns with glory, and then melts with love:  
 Now his fierce eyes with sparkling fury glow,  
 Now sighs steal out, and tears begin to flow:  
 Persians and Greeks like turns of nature found,  
 And the world's victor stood subdu'd by sound!  
 The pow'r of music all our hearts allow;  
 And what Timotheus was, is Dryden now.<sup>1</sup>

Pope has been criticizing the writers whose sole care is about language:

Their praise is still—‘The Style is excellent’:—  
 The Sense, they humbly take upon content.

Now he continues: ‘Most people judge a poet's song by his metrical skill, and say he is good or bad as he writes smoothly or roughly. Such readers wish “to please their ear, Not mend their minds”. They desire correctness of numbers, five perfect iambs, and think of nothing else.’ In the

<sup>1</sup> *English Parnassus*, p. 206.

three following lines he brilliantly gives examples of the faults he mentions—‘too much open vowelling, expletives (*do* join) and too many dull monosyllables’. Next he shows how bad poets are at the mercy of their rhymes. They do not say what they want to say, but what the rhymes that come into their heads dictate.<sup>1</sup> The next thing of note is a clever example of a bad alexandrine, one broken in two in the middle—the fatal fault of that line.

He turns to the qualities the heroic couplet should have, as his school thought—‘easy vigour, strength and sweetness’. ‘The sound must seem an echo to the sense.’ Then for eight lines of sheer virtuosity he shows the sound imitating many senses. The quotation ends with a magnificent tribute to the virtuosity of his master Dryden in his *Alexander's Feast*.

Pope was most remarkable for the polish of his verses and he is most polished in his compliments and his satirical portraits. The happiest criticism of this part of Pope's work is by Hazlitt, who, in his essay, ‘Of persons one would wish to have seen’, makes Lamb say—“Not like Pope! My dear sir, you must be under a mistake—I can read him over and over for ever!”—“Why, certainly, the *Essay on Man* must be allowed to be a masterpiece.”—“It may be so, but I seldom look into it.”—“Oh! then it's his Satires you admire?”—“No, not his Satires, but his friendly Epistles and his compliments.”—“Compliments? I did not know he ever made any.”—“The finest,” said Lamb, “that were ever

<sup>1</sup> ‘Constraint to express many things otherwise, and for the most part worse than they would have expressed them.’—MILTON.

paid by the wit of man. Each of them is worth an estate for life—nay, is an immortality . . . turn”, continued Lamb, with a slight hectic on his cheek and his eye glistening, “to his list of early friends”:

But why then publish? Granville the polite,  
And knowing Walsh, would tell me I could write;  
Well-natur'd Garth inflam'd with early praise,  
And Congreve lov'd, and Swift endur'd my lays;  
The courtly Talbot, Somers, Sheffield read,  
Ev'n mitred Rochester would nod the head,  
And St John's self (great Dryden's friends before)  
With open arms receiv'd one Poet more.  
Happy my studies, when by these approv'd!  
Happier their author, when by these belov'd!  
From these the world will judge of men and books,  
Not from the Burnets, Oldmixons, and Cooks.<sup>1</sup>

Study the aptness of the verbs and epithets in that quotation and see how they enhance the compliments to his friends. How polished the balanced antitheses of these couplets are!

Most readers, however, get most pleasure from his venomous attacks. In the same poem is the famous attack on Addison.

Peace to all such! but were there One whose fires  
True Genius kindles, and fair Fame inspires,  
Blest with each talent and each art to please,  
And born to write, converse, and live with ease :  
Should such a man, too fond to rule alone,  
Bear, like the Turk, no brother near the throne,  
View him with scornful, yet with jealous eyes,  
And hate for arts that caus'd himself to rise ;  
Damn with faint praise, assent with civil leer,  
And without sneering, teach the rest to sneer;  
Willing to wound, and yet afraid to strike,

<sup>1</sup> POPE, *Epistle to Dr Arbuthnot.*

Just hint a fault, and hesitate dislike ;  
 Alike reserv'd to blame, or to commend,  
 A tim'rous foe, and a suspicious friend,  
 Dreading ev'n fools, by flatterers besieg'd,  
 And so obliging that he ne'er oblig'd ;  
 Like Cato, give his little Senate laws,  
 And sit attentive to his own applause ;  
 While wits and Templers ev'ry sentence raise,  
 And wonder with a foolish face of praise.  
 Who but must laugh, if such a man there be ?  
 Who would not weep, if Atticus were he !<sup>1</sup>

There is the power of this closed couplet; it is the great weapon of intellectual attack, remorseless and completely without charity. Only one poet has equalled Pope in the use of this weapon—Dryden, and he surpassed him; not in the skill and polish of the verses but in his mental quality, that Olympian ease with which he trampled so devastatingly upon his enemies. Here is his Character of Buckingham in *Absalom and Achitophel*:

A man so various that he seem'd to be  
 Not one, but all mankind's epitome :  
 Stiff in opinions, always in the wrong,  
 Was everything by starts and nothing long ;  
 But in the course of one revolving moon  
 Was chemist, fiddler, statesman, and buffoon ;  
 Then all for women, painting, rhyming, drinking,  
 Besides ten thousand freaks that died in thinking.  
 Blest madman, who could every hour employ  
 With something new to wish or to enjoy !  
 Railing and praising were his usual themes,  
 And both, to show his judgement, in extremes ;  
 So over-violent or over-civil  
 That every man with him was God or Devil.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> POPE, *Epistle to Dr Arbuthnot*.

<sup>2</sup> *English Parnassus*, p. 159.

These couplets are terrible in their power and memorableness. From the moment they were published they have been on men's lips whenever Buckingham is mentioned. When, later, Dryden turned against his personal enemies and attacked the wretched poet Shadwell who had presumed to attack him, he is godlike in his amused trampling. In this quotation, the worst poet in London is supposed to be speaking of selecting his successor:

Shadwell alone my perfect image bears,  
Mature in dullness from his tender years;  
Shadwell alone of all my sons is he  
Who stands confirm'd in full stupidity.  
The rest to some faint meaning make pretence,  
But Shadwell never deviates into sense.  
Some beams of wit on other souls may fall,  
Strike through and make a lucid interval;  
But Shadwell's genuine night admits no ray,  
His rising fogs prevail upon the day:<sup>1</sup>

The advantages of the closed heroic couplet for satire are obvious. The form is neat and memorable; the couplets like the successive lashes of a whip. But from Dryden to Johnson and Goldsmith, poets satirized and argued, complimented and instructed, told stories and urged social reform in the closed heroic couplet. The form dominated that fascinating civilization of London throughout the century.

How was the couplet used before their time? Four hundred years before the last quotation, Chaucer was using a couplet just as polished and just as perfect an instrument for narrative as Dryden's was for satire. It was a polish and

<sup>1</sup> DRYDEN, *Mac Flecknoe*, 15-24.

perfection quite different in its modelling; language and subject were both so different. There is a difficulty in reading Chaucer's verses, fortunately not great, as we ought to study his couplets because of their beauty and because Chaucer was really the inventor of the form.

He got the idea from French verse, though there were some remarkably poor couplets in English that he might have worked from. That a form could be introduced and so perfected by one master is one of the miracles of English prosody. No later English poet has quite recaptured Chaucer's unwearying, unhurrying sweetness, the story-teller's especial gift.

The difficulty is in pronunciation. Chaucer's language was very different from modern English. To read Chaucer remember that he expects you to sound the final 'e' when it appears at the end of a line and sometimes in the line. At the end of the line it is a very slight sound, just as if the consonant were being made distinct by the merest 'e' after it. In the first couplet, the 'e' in 'Aprille' is sounded, in 'droghte' and 'Marche' it is not. Whenever there appears to be a syllable short in the foot, look for an 'e'. In the fifth line for example 'swete breeth' must be three syllables. In the seventh, read 'ten-dre' and 'yong-e'. Two lines later, read 'mel-o-dy-e.'

Whan that Aprille with his shoures sote  
The droghte of Marche hath perced to the rote,  
And bathed every veyne in swich licour,  
Of which vertu engendred is the flour;  
Whan Zephirus eek with his swete breeth  
Inspired hath in every holt and heeth  
The tendre croppes, and the yonge sonne

Hath in the Ram his halfe cours y-ronne,  
 And smale fowles maken melodye,  
 That slepen al the night with open yē,  
 (So priketh hem nature in hir corages):  
 Than longen folk to goon on pilgrimages  
 (And palmers for to seken straunge strandes)  
 To ferne halwes, couthe in sondry londes;  
 And specially, from every shires ende  
 Of Engelond, to Caunterbury they wende,  
 The holy blisful martir for to seke,  
 That hem hath holpen, whan that they were seke.<sup>1</sup>

So in the loveliness of an English spring and the perfect sweetness of Chaucer's heroic couplet that wonderful pilgrimage begins.

When the couplet was used again, by the Elizabethans, nearly two hundred years later, it never recovered the easy perfection with which Chaucer had endowed it. Spenser used it competently in his satirical narrative *Mother Hubbard's Tale*, and Marlowe imparted to it something of his familiar splendour in his story *Hero and Leander*. But blank verse and not the heroic couplet was the verse form in which the Elizabethans best expressed themselves. The prosodic interest in their couplet is that it is unsettled; it is neither closed nor enjambled. The very possibility that two distinct kinds could be evolved was not yet realized.

With the Romantic poets another reaction came; the reaction which produced the true enjambed type of couplet. After Pope had perfected the closed type, it became fatally easy to write. For the rest of the century it became the regular vehicle for dull words in dull verses. It decayed

<sup>1</sup> *English Parnassus*, p. 1.

utterly: and in any case it was quite unsuitable for the imaginative conceptions of the Romantic poets.

Fortunately, the Romantics, harking back to the Elizabethans for poetic delight and inspiration, found in their writings the possibility of a pentameter couplet that gave them just the vehicle they required for their descriptive and narrative inspirations. It is wrong, however, to suppose that the masters of the closed couplet were entirely ignored. Scott learned from Crabbe who learned from Pope. Byron studied Pope eagerly, and Keats before writing *Lamia* had been studying Dryden—greatly to the advantage of that poem. The point to remember is that, while out of the fluid couplet of the Elizabethans the Dryden-Pope school evolved one kind, the Romantics by reaction evolved the other.

The freedom of structure, preferring a verse paragraph to any shorter unit, which we shall find typically in narrative blank verse, was now developed in the heroic couplet. Freedom returned and all poetic loveliness returned. In the works of Scott and Byron in one generation, Keats and Shelley in the next and Browning and Morris in the third, the couplet showed itself capable of poetry that had not been suspected in it for two hundred years.

The freedom of pause and stress, which is the great secret of the use of the iambic pentameter in any form in English, was recovered as in this example from Shelley :

It is an isle 'twixt Heaven, Air, Earth, and Sea,  
Cradled, and hung in clear tranquillity;  
Bright as that wandering Eden Lucifer,

Washed by the soft blue Oceans of young air.  
 It is a favoured place Famine or Blight,  
 Pestilence, War and Earthquake, never light  
 Upon its mountain-peaks, blind vultures, they  
 Sail onward far upon their fatal way:  
 The wingèd storms, chanting their thunder-psalm  
 To other lands, leave azure chasms of calm  
 Over this isle, or weep themselves in dew,  
 From which its fields and woods ever renew  
 Their green and golden immortality.<sup>1</sup>

To mark the freedom, compare this with the illustrations from Dryden and Pope. Shelley uses the secret exploited by Shakespeare and Milton in blank verse, of keeping the iambic sound pattern underneath and developing upon it a much more various pattern of sound.

An example from Keats' *Lamia* will show the majesty and grace in this later couplet management. The brilliant control of word and vowel music gives extraordinary amplitude to the couplets.

As men talk in a dream, so Corinth all,  
 Throughout her palaces imperial,  
 And all her populous streets and temples lewd,  
 Mutter'd, like tempest in the distance brew'd,  
 To the wide-spreaded night above her towers.  
 Men, women, rich and poor, in the cool hours,  
 Shuffled their sandals o'er the pavement white,  
 Companion'd or alone; while many a light  
 Flared, here and there, from wealthy festivals,  
 And threw their moving shadows on the walls,  
 Or found them cluster'd in the corniced shade  
 Of some arch'd temple door, or dusky colonnade.<sup>2</sup>

Poetically much below this level, but very interest-

<sup>1</sup> SHELLEY, *Epipsychedion*, 457-69.

<sup>2</sup> KEATS, *Lamia*, I, 350-61.

ing in its sheer cleverness, here is an example from Browning:

That's my last Duchess painted on the wall,  
Looking as if she were alive; I call  
That piece a wonder, now: Fra Pandolf's hands  
Worked busily a day, and there she stands.  
Will't please you sit and look at her? I said  
'Frà Pandolf' by design, for never read  
Strangers like you that pictured countenance,  
The depth and passion of its earnest glance,  
But to myself they turned (since none puts by  
The curtain I have drawn for you, but I)  
And seemed as they would ask me, if they durst,  
How such a glance came there; so, not the first  
Are you to turn and ask thus. Sir, 'twas not  
Her husband's presence only, called that spot  
Of joy into the Duchess's cheek: perhaps  
Fra Pandolf chanced to say 'Her mantle laps  
Over my Lady's wrist too much,' or 'Paint  
Must never hope to reproduce the faint  
Half-flush that dies along her throat;'<sup>1</sup>

This is excited talk, and until the last couplet it is difficult to hear the iambic pentameter beat running through the lines. Not everyone is satisfied by the effect of these verses. They are very clever, but why take a pattern only to contradict it so emphatically? Others enjoy its strength and brilliance. Certainly it affords us the extreme of enjambment and—if we do enjoy it—the extreme possibility of the enjoyment of pronunciation running counter to the pattern of the verses.

These are the kinds of the heroic couplet, the form which in the length and splendour of its history is unapproached in English poetry.

<sup>1</sup> R. BROWNING, *My Last Duchess*.

## CHAPTER IX

### BLANK VERSE

#### *Early Blank Verse*

BLANK verse is made by moulding sentences into iambic pentameters without rhyme. It was invented by the poet Surrey who was responsible with Wyatt for the introduction of the sonnet into English. Surrey, while in prison in the early 1540's, began a translation of the great Latin epic, the *Aeneid*. Seeking for the most suitable verse in English to reflect the dignity and magnificence of the theme, he decided to experiment with rhymeless verses. For his original was rhymeless; and he hit upon the device of using the normal long English line as used by the great Chaucer, but denying his verses the ornament of rhyme. Every poetry in Europe was making similar experiments, such was the fame of Vergil's *Aeneid*. Indeed, Surrey may have got the idea from an Italian translation of the same poem in rhymeless verse which appeared in 1541.

His invention is one of the most important in English prosody. Thanks to him, English poetry acquired the form which was to be so magnificently used in drama and epic. He used it very imperfectly, but that is unimportant. The great thing was that the form was experimented with before the great poets came. About 20 years later it was used in tragedy, when *Gorboduc* (1563) was written by Sackville and Norton. Fifty years after

*Gorboduc*, blank verse had been developed in all its glory for dramatic purposes; the work of Marlowe, Shakespeare, Jonson and Chapman was complete.

The essence of blank verse is not to pause only at the end of the line. That draws attention to the lack of rhyme, and makes blank verse merely heroic verse without rhyme. The rhymelessness suggests and requires internal pause. Released from 'the troublesome and modern bondage of rhyming' as Milton said, blank verse offers 'apt numbers, fit quantity of syllables, and the sense variously drawn out from one verse into another'. Surrey and other early experimenters were naturally afraid that their verses might degenerate into stilted prose if the pentameter structure was not stressed by emphatic pausing at the end of the line. An example from Surrey will appear very poor when compared with the quotations from Shakespeare and Milton which follow. But Surrey's verses had the dignity appropriate to the epic and showed the possibility of the magnificence which was to come :

beasts | and fowls | of di | verse hue,  
 And what | so that | in the | broad lakes | remained,  
 Or yet | among | the bush | y thicks | of briar,  
 Laid down | to sleep | by si | lence of | the night,  
 'Gan swage | their cares, | <sup>—</sup>mindless | of tra | vails past.  
 Not so | the spir | <sup>—</sup>it of this | Phoenic | ian.  
 Unhap | py she! | that on | no sleep | could chance,  
 Nor yet | night's rest | <sup>—</sup>enter | in eye, | or breast.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Aeneid*, iv, 706-13.

The verses run very uncertainly: the 2nd is particularly awkward, the 5th, 6th and 8th have substitution—used, not as it should be used, to reflect the sense or mood, but simply because the words do not fit the pattern. The sentences fit very uncomfortably into the form, although they are moulded so that clauses and lines coincide. Twice, indeed, ('thicks' for 'thickets' and 'gan' for 'began') he has to truncate his words to keep the verse pattern.

Surrey demonstrated the suitability of his verse for epic; for the rest of the century it was developed in drama. From *Gorboduc* to Marlowe the lines remained individual. In the great passages of Marlowe the single lines are magnificent (the famous phrase, 'Marlowe's mighty line', is no more than appropriate) and they follow one another magnificently, but they are always a series of individual lines. This passage from Marlowe shows how far dramatic blank verse had developed before Shakespeare:

O, thou art fairer than the evening air  
 Clad in the beauty of a thousand stars;  
 Brighter art thou than flaming Jupiter  
 When he appear'd to hapless Semele;  
 More lovely than the monarch of the sky  
 In wanton Arethusa's azur'd arms;  
 And none but thou shalt be my paramour!<sup>1</sup>

In Surrey we noticed that verse structure and clause structure coincide. That remains the rule until Shakespeare's mature verse. The first development was that clauses overlapped the lines (as in lines 5-6 above) while a strong rhythmical pause

<sup>1</sup> *Doctor Faustus*, xiii.

remained. The final development, dropping the emphatic rhythmical pause, only appeared in Shakespeare's mature work. Even there, by the nature of the verse form, a pause always remains, however slightly it may be stressed.

### *Shakespeare*

Shakespeare, then, was the pupil of Marlowe in blank verse. He soon surpassed his master, but his early work was very inferior to the passage just quoted. Shakespeare's work, indeed, offers us examples of blank verse in all its stages from the stiff, stilted beginning to perfection. All but the earliest stage can be illustrated by quotations 'every schoolboy knows'. This example comes from *Titus Andronicus* (III, i):

For all | my blood | in Rome's | great quar | rel shed;  
For all | the frost | y nights | that I | have watched;  
And for | these bit | ter tears, | which now | you see  
Filling | the ag | èd wrin | les in | my cheeks;  
Be pit | iful | to my | condemn | èd sons,  
Whose souls | are not | corrupt | ed as | 'tis thought.

Every foot (with an exception marked) is an iambic, every line has five regular measures and there is a definite pause at the end of every line. Its immaturity is marked by the iambic beat sounding heavily through the lines so that they tramp out their monotonous course, one after another.

The next quotation shows a marked development. We no longer feel in the famous speech by Antony over the body of Caesar that the poet

is filling up the line on the correct iambic pattern and is afraid the reader will not notice how correct it is all the time. The orator appears to be speaking as he wishes, without the metre confining or crippling him. The lines are still single, but that is very appropriate in mob oratory, where after any simple idea has been offered time must be given for it to sink in. The line that mocks Brutus is like a quick recurring gesture:

And Brutus is an honourable man.

In these verses speech has become quick like the characters the poet now creates.

He was | my friend, | faithful | and just | to me:

But Brut | us says | he was | ambit | ious;

And Brut | us is | an hon | ourab | le man.

He hath | brought man | y cap | tives home | to Rome

Whose ran | soms did | the gen | eral | cof | fers fill:

Did this | in Cae | sar seem | ambit | ious?

Only twice is the regular pattern departed from. The slow rise, the emphasis and the fall of these lines is rather like Marlowe's line movement. The orator stresses by alliteration the words which carry the ideas. Already the lines can take character and colour from the ideas they convey.

The next quotation (*Henry IV*, Pt 1, V, iv) is the speech of the dying Hotspur:

O Har | ry! thou | hast robbed | me of | my youth.

I bet | ter brook | the loss | of brit | tle life

Than those | proud tit | les thou | hast won | of me;

They wound | my thoughts | worse than | thy sword | my flesh:

But thought's | the slave | of life, | and life's | time's fool;  
And time, | that takes | survey | of all | the world,  
Must have | a stop.

Now in this passage every foot (with the one possible exception marked) is iambic and there is just as emphatic a pause at the end of every line. But it reads much better. Repeat either of the previous speeches aloud and then this, and you will see how much more pleasure this gives you. Why? The lines are single and iambically correct; but they are not monotonous. Take the fourth:

They *wound* my thoughts *worse* than thy sword my flesh.

There is poetical fancy which the line reacts to, waking up as it were and helping the thought. The emphasized words again alliterate. Take the last:

And *time*, that takes survey of *all* the world.

In this line too the even, unrelievedly regular iambic movement has given way to something nearer excited speech expressing poetical ideas. There is an emphatic pause after 'time,' and then the words run quickly till a long gesture is made of the 'all'. But the most important development this passage shows is that the lines, although they are single, are no longer monotonous. There is variety of pause and emphasis, so managed that the lines follow one another pleasantly. The single lines we found gave point and emphasis to Antony's speech. Each line 'told', as we say. It

is the poetry of a mob orator. But here we have the same verse used for poetry by that poetical youth Hotspur, who even in death, made proud images of the world.

For a moment, with the dying Hotspur, we touched passionate poetry. Now we turn to a very famous speech in which the thrill of passion is wanting. Here we have the cynical intellectual, fastidiously selecting images that mock mankind—Jacques in *As You Like It* (II, vii).

And then | the lov |<sup>o</sup>er,  
 Sighing | like fur | nace, with | a woe| ful bal |<sup>o</sup>lad  
 Made to | his mis | tress' eye | brow. Then | a sol |<sup>o</sup>dier  
 Full of | strange oaths | and beard | ed like | the pard,  
 Jealous | in hon | our, sud |<sup>o</sup>den and quick | in quar |<sup>o</sup>rel,  
 Seeking | the bub | ble re | puta |<sup>o</sup>tion  
 Even in | the can | non's mouth. | And then | the jus |<sup>o</sup>tice,  
 In fair | round bel | ly with | good cap | on lin'd,  
 With eyes | severe, | and beard | of for | mal cut,  
 Full of | wise saws | and mod | ern in | stances;  
 • And so | he plays | his part.

The verses of Jacques are evidently much more developed (just as the ideas are more subtle) than those of the earlier characters. Five of the lines take the liberty of the extra syllable, the feminine ending. The weak ending emphasizes the pause, while, as it were, the speaker seeks a suitable way of describing still another stage in the pathetic progress of man. Six lines have trochaic substitution

in the first foot giving the effect of the speaker grasping at the next image as it comes. The free management of the lines offers great scope to the actor in giving comic emphasis to this absurd state. The fifth line is remarkable. It is an exact imitation of the mood. The quickness of the jealousy and the quarrelling are reflected first in the inverted foot and then in the trisyllabic substitution, while the disorder of the anger is reflected in the weak ending. Note that the sixth line is prosodically correct if we pronounce the suffix of the last word as the Elizabethans pronounced it—‘see-on’. Now look at the description of the justice. How primly dignified the lines have become and how they contrast with the languishing lover line, and the disordered swashbuckling soldier’s line. All is formality and scrupulous correctness.

We turn now to the most famous soliloquy of Hamlet. Here the poet wishes to give us the uneasy, restless thinking of the man who desired nothing more than to do something and could never get beyond endless turnings of thought. How are the verses managed?

To be, | or not | to be: | that is | the ques | tion:  
Whether | 'tis nobl | er in | the mind | to suf | fer  
The slings | and ar | rows of | outrag | eous for | tune,  
Or to | take arms | against | a sea | of troubl | es,  
And by | oppos | ing end | them? To die: | to sleep;  
No more; | and, by | a sleep | to say | we end  
The heart | ache and | the thou | sand nat | ural shocks

That flesh | is heir | to, 'tis | a con | summa | tion  
Devout | ly to | be wished. | To die, | to sleep;  
To sleep: | perchance | to dream: | ay, there's | the rub;  
For in | that sleep | of death | what dreams | may come  
When we | have shuffl | ed off| this mor | tal coil,  
Must give | us pause.

The mood is one of uncertainty; of questioning. That is reflected in the metre by the weak endings to the first four lines. In reading the fifth line we should remember that Shakespeare's punctuation marked the length of time of the pause. This line is in great contrast to the three preceding. Hamlet opens doubtfully, and then his metaphor hurries him along till he returns to his questioning. The metaphors are as daring as ever Elizabethan used and they illustrate Hamlet's endless, violent urge towards action. Reflection follows to drag the end of the fifth line, but the idea that to die is merely to sleep brings such relief that the verses run easily until again reflection agonizes him; sleep may mean dreams. The ninth and tenth lines are broken by this idea. The two following lines return to smoothness and normality and are fine examples of the music with which this iambic pentameter can be filled by a master. In the last short line sense and metre march together; we read it as we may scan it:—

Must give | us pause.

In these examples we have alternated intellectual moods with emotional. We turn now to one of

the great emotional speeches in *Lear* (III, ii). Here we find perfection in the expression of passion:

Blow winds, | and crack | your cheeks! | rage! | blow!  
 You cat | aracts | and hur | rican | oes, spout  
 Till you | have drenched | our steep | les, drowned | the cocks!  
 You sul | phurous and | thought-ex | ecut | ing fires,  
 Vaunt-cour | iers to | oak-cleav | ing thun | derbolts,  
 Singe my | white head! | And thou, | all-shak | ing thun | der,  
 Smite flat | the thick | rotund | ity o' | the world!  
 Crack nat | ure's moulds, | all ger | mens spill | at once,  
 That make | ingrate | ful | man!

There is no thought development here as in the last quotation. This is a storm affecting the disordered brain of an old, mad man. The effect is terrible: for the impression is that in his outcry he actually dominates the storm by his ability to realize and describe it. Rain, lightning and thunder; all are described in language which encompasses the terror of the storm. This speech seems to control chaos itself by describing it.

Prosodical analysis shows that every admissible liberty is taken with the verses, each as is necessary. In the first line the two last feet are of single syllables; an extraordinary liberty. In the second line the dynamic verb is a detached syllable after a pause, gaining all the force of its position as last word in the line. In the third, the first foot is inverted so that the next accent comes with great force on the strong verb 'drenched'. Indeed the accents on 'drenched', 'steeples', 'drowned' and 'cocks' are so heavy that the mind reels as it reads, absorbing the idea of a world in which the highest towers are drowned. The use of double epithets in the

succeeding lines gives the very agony of passion; sound made agonizing and terrible.

It seems ridiculous to refer to the iambic pattern in scanning these lines; but it is there and it is the secret of the effect. The words seem about to burst through the metrical form as the lightning destroys calm. But it is that apparent struggle against the metrical form while working within it that gives us the most splendid things in English poetry. The last full line gives another spondee opening :

Cracks — — — nature's moulds

this time giving the effect of immense straining.

These verses are among the great triumphs of the blank verse form. No other verse form in English can sustain so much; and this is far beyond the capacity of prose. The secret is the working within a form and yet seeming to be breaking away from it and through it in every line. Yet in his wildest extravagances the poet courts the form, as an eagle courts the wind. No other poet has written blank verse to serve passion like this, and only Marlowe and Milton have approached equal magnificence.

There is another perfection to be attained in blank verse, a perfection in which we shall find Milton as happy as Shakespeare—the perfection of calm. It is a perfection in happy contrast to the violent exertion of the last example, and it is found in Prospero's famous speech in *The Tempest* (IV, i):

Our rev | els now | are end | ed. These | our act | ors  
As I | foretold | you, were | all spir | its, and

Are melt | ed in | to air, | into | thin air:  
 And, like | the base | less fab | ric of | this vis | ion,  
 The cloud-| capped towers, | the gorg | eous | pala | ces,  
 The sol | emn temp | les, the | great globe | itself,  
 Yea, all | which it | inher | it, shall | dissolve  
 And, like | this in | substan | tial pag | eant fad | ed,  
 Leave not | a rack | behind. | We are | such stuff  
 As dreams | are made | of, and | our lit | tle life  
 Is round | ed with | a sleep.

This is the very insinuation of sleep. The quiet movements of the lines fall with a lulling sense upon the ear and slide as easily as dreams into one another. The poet rests in the metrical form. Look at the placing of the first three 'ands'. The first is at the end so that we slip into the next line, the next two are at the beginning so that after the merest pause we rise upon the long lift of the unbroken phrase that follows. In such verses where the beat of the metre is so quietly maintained, much of the secret of the rise and fall of the verse rests in the vowels. Here is exquisitely restful diversity of long and short vowels. They lengthen as the vision rises in the fourth and fifth lines:

The cloud-capped towers, the gorgeous palaces,  
 The solemn temples, the great globe itself.

Then, when the fading of the 'insubstantial pageant' is to be recorded, the vowels grow lighter:

Leave not a rack behind.

Then, with soft 's' sounds and lulling 'l's, the last sentence, wonderfully modelled, exquisitely enjambed, rounds the waking vision into sleep and silence.

Blank verse had been used for drama scarcely fifty years when this speech was written: it was to be used for barely thirty more. It is unnecessary to study here the ruggedness of the Roman grandeur of Ben Jonson's blank verse, the 'full proud sail' of Chapman's line, or the blank verses that were the form for the sentimentality of Beaumont and Fletcher and the intense morbidity of Webster. All these men were writing at the same time as Shakespeare, and when their work was done the decay was rapid and complete. Despite various efforts much later by Scott and Beddoes, Tennyson and Hardy, the glory of blank verse has never returned to drama.

Verse is used to exalt a theme by making language possible in this heightened rhythm which would otherwise be too grandiloquent. Blank verse served this purpose magnificently for the Elizabethan stage. In Shakespeare's hands the form grew from the single moulded line to the longer unit of the speech. In Shakespeare's mature work the unit was the speech. The next speaker had a different personality, perhaps a different mood, so the verses could have no continuity from one speech to another. The speech itself might end anywhere in the line and the next speaker take it up and end the line: for controlling the characteristics and moods of the speakers was the atmosphere of the scene. In the next section we shall see how another problem in the building of these blank verse lines was faced and solved by Milton.

*Narrative*

The poet of narrative blank verse faces a different problem from the poet of dramatic blank verse. He is concerned with the long unfolding of a story, while the dramatic poet is concerned with brief, spoken scenes. The movement of the lines themselves shows all the difference between the unfaltering story-teller and the crisp spoken word. The longer unit of the narrative poet is the paragraph and of the dramatic poet the scene.

For it would be intolerable to read a long story in verse in which sense and sound stopped at the end of every line as in Surrey's translation. Nor will the sentence suffice as a unit. The narrative flow would be too frequently interrupted. As in prose, a longer unit is required. So the blank verse paragraph was evolved.

The paragraph as developed by Milton presents a more rigid structure than that in dramatic blank verse, but the essence of it is variety in the lines obtained by enjambment—'the sense variously drawn out from one verse into another'—variety of pause, and substitution.

The successful structure of narrative blank verse then depends upon:

- (1) Substitution, especially trochaic substitution in the first foot.
- (2) Placing the pause variously in succeeding lines.
- (3) Enjambment.
- (4) Giving a sense of structure with the assistance of the preceding rules by building

the verses into paragraphs which each form a satisfying unit of sound.

(5) Balancing and contrasting the length and movement of succeeding paragraphs.

In the management of narrative blank verse Milton, who first brought it to perfection, remains the supreme master. The study of Milton will fit the student to analyse any narrative blank verse in English. In his two epics Milton

pursues  
Things unattempted yet in prose or rhyme

and the verses in which he unfolds his 'great argument' are unapproached by anything in English narrative poetry in their nobility, their splendour and their severe perfection.

The five rules for the successful writing of narrative blank verse will therefore be proved by an analysis of certain speeches in *Paradise Lost*.

The first example is the opening paragraph of the poem, which is the traditional epic invocation of the Muses, turned by this Christian writer to an invocation of the 'Heav'ly Muse'. A comparison of this paragraph with the earlier quotation from Surrey will emphasize Milton's mastery.

Of man's first disobedience, and the fruit	8. 3
Of that forbidden tree, whose mortal taste	6. 4
Brought death into the world, and all our woe,	6. 4
With loss of Eden, till one greater Man	5. 5
Restore us, and regain the blissful seat,	3. 7
Sing Heav'ly Muse, that on the secret top	5. 6
Of Oreb, or of Sinai, didst inspire	3. 4: 3
That Shepherd, who first taught the chosen seed,	3. 7
In the beginning how the Heav'ns and Earth	11
Rose out of chaos: or if Sion hill	5. 5

Delight thee more, and Siloa's brook that flow'd	4. 7
Fast by the oracle of God; I thence	8. 2
Invoke thy aid to my advent'rous song,	10
That with no middle flight intends to soar	10
Above th' Aonian Mount, while it pursues	8. 4
Things unattempted yet in prose or rhyme.	10
And chiefly Thou O Spirit, that dost prefer	7. 4
Before all temples th' upright heart and pure,	11
Instruct me, for Thou know'st; Thou from the first	3. 4: 4
Wast present, and with mighty wings outspread	3. 7
Dove-like satst brooding on the vast abyss	10
And mad'st it pregnant: What in me is dark	5. 5
Illumine, what is low raise and support;	3. 7
That to the highth of this great argument	10
I may assert Eternal Providence,	10
And justify the ways of God to men.	10

The figures at the side show the number of syllables before and after the pause. Where there is a double pause a colon indicates the longer. It will be seen that in these twenty-six lines only nine have no pause, and that the rest pause somewhere between the third and eighth syllables. This illustrates rules two and three. Notice that only once do consecutive lines (2 and 3) pause in the same place.

The first rule is illustrated in the first line. The fourth foot is an anapæst. 'Heav'nly' in the sixth line must undoubtedly be read as three syllables however slightly the middle one is pronounced, which produces trisyllabic substitution there. In the next line 'of Sinai didst' gives another anapæst. The special significance of these substitutions need not be stressed here; though in passing it may be noted that the two short syllables in the first line coming just after the pause and the unimportant syllables after it

(‘and the’) gives emphasis to ‘fruit’: that in the same way in line 6 ‘Sing’ receives emphasis with three weaker syllables following it. True, we cannot afford to linger here on these delightful minutiae of prosodic criticism. But we cannot pass by the really significant substitution in the tenth line—‘Rose out of chaos’. Form and meaning are together in that trochaic substitution in the first foot. Line 12 is the same. ‘Dove-like’ in line 21 may be called an ‘even foot’. This name has not (I believe) been used before but such a name is required. For a remarkable number of feet in *Paradise Lost* have syllables which are of equal length without being definitely either long or short. Foot 2, line 1, is the first example. The first feet of lines 3, 6, 8, 20 and 21 are all of this indeterminate length. The stress is neither normal nor inverted: it is equal. And this equality of stress has a very powerful effect in cumulation upon the weight and power of the verses.

An inversion (i.e. trochaic substitution) produces a pendulum motion between the inverted and succeeding foot. It seems to urge on the line. This is evident in the inversions already quoted and in the last two feet of lines 19 and 23. As a device, it is perhaps strongest in its effect at the end of the line and it is used in that place throughout the poem. In line 19 the pendulum, coming after so definite a pause, seems to set the surging idea rising and it is sustained by the same device in the 23rd and is followed there by the three sublimely unfaltering lines in which the great idea of the poem is expressed.

The paragraph pauses at line 16 and might well end there. For that line is typically the kind Milton uses to close a paragraph—an iambic pentameter without substitution and without a pause.

<sup>1</sup> The next quotation is the first three paragraphs of Book Two, including the speech of Satan to his legions in Hell:

High on a throne of royal state, which far  
Outshone the wealth of Ormus and of Ind,  
Or where the gorgeous East with richest hand  
Showers on her kings barbaric pearl and gold,  
Satan exalted sat, by merit rais'd  
To that bad eminence; and from despair  
Thus high uplifted beyond hope, aspires  
Beyond thus high, insatiate to pursue  
Vain war with Heav'n, and by success untaught  
His proud imaginations thus displayed.  
Powers and Dominions, Deities of Heav'n,  
For since no deep within her gulf can hold  
Immortal vigour, though opprest and fall'n,  
I give not Heav'n for lost. From this descent  
Celestial virtues rising, will appear  
More glorious and more dread than from no fall,  
And trust themselves to fear no second fate:  
Me though just right, and the fixt laws of Heav'n  
Did first create your leader, next, free choice,  
With what besides, in counsel or in fight,  
Hath been achiev'd of merit, yet this loss  
Thus far at least recover'd, hath much more  
Establisht in a safe unenvied throne  
Yielded with full consent. The happier state  
In Heav'n, which follows dignity, might draw  
Envy from each inferior; but who here  
Will envy whom the highest place exposes  
Foremost to stand against the thunderer's aim  
Your bulwark, and condemns to greatest share  
Of endless pain? Where there is then no good  
For which to strive, no strife can grow up there

From faction; for none sure will claim in hell  
 Precedence, none, whose portion is so small  
 Of present pain, that with ambitious mind  
 Will covet more. With this advantage then      35  
 To union, and firm faith, and firm accord,  
 More than can be in Heav'n, we now return  
 To claim our just inheritance of old,  
 Surer to prosper than prosperity  
 Could have assur'd us; and by what best way,      40  
 Whether of open war or covert guile,  
 We now debate. Who can advise, may speak.  
 He ceas'd, and next him Moloch, scepter'd king  
 Stood up, the strongest and the fiercest spirit  
 That fought in Heav'n; now fiercer by despair:      45  
 His trust was with th' Eternal to be deem'd  
 Equal in strength, and rather than be less  
 Car'd not to be at all; with that care lost  
 Went all his fear: of God, or hell, or worse  
 He reck'd not, and these words thereafter spake.      50

These paragraphs show the fifth rule in operation. The first is description, briefly giving the setting and the mood of the speaker. The second is the blustering speech of the leader of men, his 'proud imaginations' having much 'sound and fury'. The third briefly introduces the next speaker, who is more strident and truculent than Satan himself. The smooth enjambment of the third paragraph gives the contrasting movement which the poet requires as an interlude between the speeches. In the speech itself the personal pride in all the oratorical thundering is emphasized by the large number of strong initial syllables. Twelve lines (1, 4, 5, 11, 18, 24, 26, 28, 37, 39, 41, 47,) begin with trochaic substitution, to which 'even feet' must be added (14, 15, 16, 19, 21, 22, 29, 40, 44, 48, 49). The twelve words which make trochaic

substitution in the initial foot all demand emphasis in the argument, and get it by their position in the line. The most striking is the eleventh which is spoken

— ˘ ˘ — ˘ — ˘ ˘ — ˘  
Powers and Dominions, Deities of Heav'n,

The boldness of it (the reader feels) captures the ear of the vast audience and that effect is caught by the double 'pendulum'.

Compare this speech with the speech of God in Book V:

Hear all ye angels, progeny of light,  
Thrones, Dominations, Princedoms, Virtues, Powers,  
Hear my decree, which unrevok't shall stand.  
This day I have begot whom I declare  
My only Son, and on this holy hill  
Him have anointed, whom ye now behold  
At my right hand; your head I him appoint;  
And by my Self have sworn to him shall bow  
All knees in Heav'n, and shall confess him Lord:  
Under his great vice-gerent reign abide  
United as one individual soul  
For ever happy: him who disobeys  
Me disobeys, breaks union, and that day  
Cast out from God and blessed vision, falls  
Into utter darkness, deep ingulf't, his place  
Ordain'd without redemption, without end.<sup>1</sup>

The trochaic substitution of the first foot will at once be observed. The second line is one of the great lines, powerful in its whole procedure, each word by its placing demanding a pause. An imperative trochee opens the third line, and the final nature of the 'decree' is emphasized by the three 'even' feet which end the line: every

<sup>1</sup> *Paradise Lost*, V, 600-15.

syllable of the last six demands a definite emphasis. Even that is surpassed in the last four lines by the awful finality of the doom emphasized by the prosody:

Me disobeys, breaks union, and that day  
 Cast out from God and blessed vision, falls  
 Into utter darkness, deep ingulf't, his place  
 Ordain'd without redemption, without end.

The clusterings of long syllables, the two emphatic pauses in the first line, the emphasis on 'falls' in the next, not only as standing single after the pause but as followed in the next line by two weak syllables, the emphatic pauses, and heavy syllables round them in the third line and the ten slow syllables of the last, with the utter finality of the three following the pause, all are managed by the poet's superb craftsmanship.

The final example is a passage of a very different order. The previous quotations are all dramatic, impersonal, speeches to suit the speakers, or descriptions of great imaginative power but quite impersonal. This quotation is lyrical rather than epic, it is a cry of Milton's own heart.

Hail, holy light, offspring of Heav'n first-born,  
 Or of th' Eternal Co-eternal beam  
 May I express thee unblam'd? since God is light,  
 And never but in unapproachèd light  
 Dwelt from eternity, dwelt then in thee,      5  
 Bright effluence of bright essence increate.  
 Or hear'st thou rather pure ethereal stream,  
 Whose fountain who shall tell? before the Sun,  
 Before the Heavens thou wert, and at the voice  
 Of God, as with a mantle didst invest      10  
 The rising world of waters dark and deep,  
 Won from the void and formless infinite.

Thee I re-visit now with bolder wing,  
 Escap't the Stygian pool, though long detain'd  
 In that obscure sojourn, while in my flight 15  
 Through utter and through middle darkness borne  
 With other notes than to th' Orphean lyre  
 I sung of chaos and eternal night,  
 Taught by the heav'nly muse to venture down  
 The dark descent and up to reascend, 20  
 Though hard and rare: thee I revisit safe,  
 And feel thy sovran vital lamp; but thou  
 Revisit'st not these eyes, that roll in vain  
 To find thy piercing ray, and find no dawn;  
 So thick a drop serene hath quencht their orbs, 25  
 Or dim suffusion veil'd. Yet not the more  
 Cease I to wander where the muses haunt  
 Clear spring, or shady grove, or sunny hill,  
 Smit with the love of sacred song; but chief  
 Thee Sion and the flow'ry brooks beneath 30  
 That wash thy hallowed feet, and warbling flow,  
 Nightly I visit: nor sometimes forget  
 Those other two equal'd with me in fate,  
 So were I equal'd with them in renown,  
 Blind Thamyris and blind Mæonides, 35  
 And Tiresias and Phineus prophets old.  
 Then feed on thoughts, that voluntary move  
 Harmonious numbers; as the wakeful bird  
 Sings darkling, and in shadiest covert hid  
 Tunes her nocturnal note. Thus with the year 40  
 Seasons return, but not to me returns  
 Day, or the sweet approach of ev'n or morn,  
 Or sight of vernal bloom, or summer's rose,  
 Or flocks, or herds, or human face divine;  
 But cloud instead, and ever-during dark 45  
 Surrounds me, from the cheerful ways of men  
 Cut off, and for the book of knowledge fair  
 Presented with a universal blank  
 Of Nature's works to me expung'd and ras'd,  
 And wisdom at one entrance quite shut out. 50  
 So much the rather thou celestial light  
 Shine inward, and the mind through all her powers  
 Irradiate, there plant eyes, all mist from thence

Purge and disperse, that I may see and tell  
Of things invisible to mortal sight.<sup>1</sup>

55

The verses reflect the lyrical mood, for they seem to defy at times the grave epic prosodical rules. It would be absurd to impose the strict iambic pentameter pattern upon

May I express thee unblam'd ? since God is light,  
or  
Bright effluence of bright essence increate  
or  
And Tiresias and Phineus prophets old.

and equally absurd to claim any prosodical 'magic' in their great beauty. But the prosodist must claim that the poet has studiously sought the assistance of the rules in gaining many of the effects through the passages of inexpressible beauty in this paragraph.

Take the sentence beginning in line 40: 'Thus with the year. . . .' The first foot of the sentence offers the familiar trochaic substitution, creating that pendulum swing into the subject which is now familiar to us. 'Day' gains great emphasis by its placing, as do 'Surrounds me' and 'Cut off'. And after the subtle pausing and balancing of line pauses in 'various sweetness' the last three unbroken lines read starkly as their content demands.

That 'various sweetness' is evident in the earlier sentence beginning at line 26, which expresses the same lyrical reflective mood. It is not fantastic to find in these two sentences a fluidity in contrast to the severe structure of the form. Milton would

<sup>1</sup> *Paradise Lost*, III, 1-55.

never have permitted himself this liberty in the procedure of his poem, but it appears naturally in an invocation.

As a paragraph this invocation is very interesting. The length of the sentences (6, 6, 13+, +10, 3+, +10, 5 lines), as well as their contrasting sound and quality, repays study. For blank verse paragraphs require study in the same way as prose paragraphs, noting the opening and closing sentences for length and for subject treatment, and all the sentences as uniting and contrasting in this the largest of the sensuous units.

For *Paradise Lost* offers the richest and most magnificent organization of sound units in English poetry: and the glowing delight of these qualities is present throughout the poem. *Paradise Regained* offers these delights but rarely. In that poem the poet frequently appears to disdain his form as if the notion that the verses expect to be beautiful irks him. He probably considered sensuous beauty irreverent in an argument so religiously exalted.

In his final poem, *Samson Agonistes*, he returns to the glorious joy of making splendid verses. Again he uses blank verse except in the lyrical passages and again the blank verse has the lyrical exaltation and ease that we found in the last lyrical quotation from *Paradise Lost*. The verses are extremely difficult to analyse and no attempt need be made to do so here; but for the guidance of those who wish to attempt it, it may be noted that the basis is the iambic pentameter, however often the poet appears to override the rules of his metre. It is an extreme example of that 'opposition which is the life of verse'.

## GLOSSARY OF COMMON TERMS

**ACEPHALOUS.** A line in which the first syllable is missing:  
e.g.

    ˘ Sport | that wrinkled care derides  
    ˘ And laugh | ter holding both his sides.  
    ˘ Come | and trip it as you go  
    ˘ On | the light fantastic toe.

**ALEXANDRINE.** A line of six iambic feet. Rarely successfully used continuously, its chief use has been to end stanzas, as in the Spenserian Stanza, the Epithalamion, and the *Ode on the Morning of Christ's Nativity*. Frequently appears in Shakespeare's blank verse and occasionally in Dryden's couplets.

**ALLITERATION.** The repetition of the same consonant at the beginning of words near enough for the sound to be noticeably repeated. Before the present system was introduced, English prosody depended on alliteration of stressed syllables: e.g.

A fair field: full of folk

When the present system prevailed, alliteration remained irresistible: so much so that we can call it a part of the old prosody which has refused to die.

**AMPHIBRACH.** A foot of three syllables, short, long, short (˘—˘), occasionally used:

The black bands | came over (Byron)

**ANAPÆST.** A foot of three syllables, short, short, long (˘˘—). Very commonly used in comic verse, e.g. Goldsmith's *Retaliation*:

Who mixed rea | son with pleas | ure, and wis | dom with mirth  
Commonly substituted for an iamb in iambic pentameters.

**ASSONANCE.** An imperfect form of rhyme in which only the vowel sounds are alike. Not much used in English, but attempted by Mrs Browning and Mr Yeats.

**BALLAD STANZA.** A stanza of four iambic lines, tetrameter, trimeter, tetrameter, trimeter, rhyming on the trimeters. (See Chapter III.)

**BLANK VERSE.** Iambic pentameters without rhyme built into speeches in drama and paragraphs in narrative. (See Chapter IX.)

**CÆSURA.** Mentioned here to say that it is an unnecessary word in English prosody coming from the confusion with classical metres. In the classical sense it does not exist in English. Use 'pause' only.

**CATALEXIS.** Used of a line one syllable short. Hypercatalexis is used for one syllable too many.

**CODA.** A musical term, literally meaning 'tail', for an extra part rounding off a piece: used in prosody of a batch of verses rounding off a poem, as the last eight lines of *Lycidas*.

**COUPLET.** Two lines of equal length 'coupled' with rhyme. (See Chapters VII and VIII.)

**DACTYL.** A foot of three syllables, long, short, short (—○○) which appears very occasionally.

Take her up | tenderly

**DOGGEREL.** A very old word for bad versifying. Doggerel verses are usually weak in grammar and syntax as well as in metre.

**ELISION.** The obliteration of a vowel or syllable which is redundant in the metrical pattern. This involves a great question in English prosody. If it were demanded that the correct number of syllables should be in every foot English verse would be full of elision. Some prosodists hold that extra syllables should always be elided: others say that these syllables are frequently to be neither ignored nor slurred; but that they give the pleasure of variety to the verses, and that pleasure is the fundamental

sensuous one in English verse. The extra syllable involves 'trisyllabic substitution'; and in this book this is held to be the secret of much of the pleasure in English verse and essential in blank verse. Take the lines from *Lycidas*:

Shatter your leaves before the mell, | <sup>u</sup> <sup>u</sup> <sup>—</sup> owing year.  
Without the meed of some | melod | <sup>u</sup> <sup>u</sup> <sup>—</sup> ious tear.

Either the reader enjoys the full, gracious sound of 'owing year', and 'ious tear' or he says 'mell-wing year' and 'melod-yous tear'. This book maintains that the first is as beautiful as the second is ugly.

**END-STOPPED.** The term applied to the self-contained verses of early blank verse when writers were still so afraid of its being mistaken for prose that they made an emphatic pause at the end of each line.

**ENJAMBMENT.** The term used for the running on of sense and movement from one verse to another. Very important in the history of the Heroic Couplet. (See Chapter VIII.)

**EPODE.** The third and last stanza of the group which is used in the regular ode. (See Chapter VI.)

**EYE-RHYME.** The kind of imperfect rhyme which appears to the eye to be correct but is not because the words are pronounced differently: e.g. word, sword.

**FEMININE RHYME OR FEMININE ENDING OR WEAK ENDING.** Used of the last syllable when it is extrametrical and unstressed and so when rhyme is used involves double rhyme on a stressed and unstressed syllable. Originally applied to any double rhyme. (But see REDUNDANCE.)

**FOOT.** The unit of measurement in normal English metre. The feet used in English consist of one stressed and one or two unstressed syllables. Occasionally a foot of two stresses is used. The natural foot in English is the iambic (u —); while the trochee (— u) and the anapæst (u u —) are common. (See Chapter I.)

**FOURTEENER.** A line of seven iambic feet. The Ballad Stanza is really a fourteener couplet. As a line became

popular in the nineteenth century According to the nomenclature of this book, ought to be called 'heptameter'

**HEROIC.** Used in the phrase 'Heroic Couplet', a name for the iambic pentameter couplet First used in the seventeenth century when the 'heroic' poem or play was written in this couplet

**HEXAMETER** A line of six feet, in English usually of iambics, and a line of six iambs is called an *Alexandrine*

**IAMBIC** The staple foot in English meter consists of two syllables, short, long (˘ -)

**LEONINE RHYME** Name given to internal rhyme

On my speckled *hude*, not you the *pride*

**LINE** The unit in English prosody between the foot and the stanza or verse paragraph Its integrity is shown by the printing, but it has a prosodical unity too, however enjambed the metre may be This should be respected by always pausing at the end of the line when reading

**METRE** From a Greek word meaning 'measure' English metre depends on the fact that in English words some syllables are stressed and others are not, and these are found in excited speech to recur in regular patterns, or can be made to do so The effect of metre is to stimulate the attention

**OCTAVE** A stanza of eight lines (See Chapter IV) Used of the arrangement of the first eight lines of the Italian sonnet (See Chapter V)

**ODE** In Greek the word means simply 'song' As English uses the word 'lyric' in that sense, 'ode' is used for the long and highly organized lyric Within these limits the term is used in various special senses (See Chapter VI.)

**OTTAVA RIMA.** A stanza of eight lines rhyming *abababcc* It is an Italian stanza and the Italian name has remained. (See Chapter IV).

**PAUSE** A break in the metrical line. The pause always occurs at the end of a word and usually with a pause in the sense. Of the greatest importance in giving variety

to the metre. The most striking and masterly use of the pause is in Milton's blank verse paragraphs (See Chapter IX.) In the iambic pentameter the pause most frequently occurs after the fourth or sixth syllables. In Milton it comes after any syllable, invariably with studied effect.

**PENTAMETER** A line of five feet. The line of five iambs is the usual line in English for serious subjects.

**PINDARIC ODE** The ode as used by Pindar—the most elaborate type (See Chapter VI.)

**QUANTITY.** Used of the quantity of time taken to pronounce a syllable. This time element is essential in Greek and Latin prosody and in them is equivalent in importance to stress in English prosody. Quantity must be taken into account in the study of English prosody but it is so unessential that the ordinary student may ignore it.

**QUATRAIN** A stanza of four lines (See Chapters I and II.)

**REDUNDANCE** Another name for the feminine or weak ending. An extra syllable at the end of a line not strictly part of the last foot.

**RHYME** Gives the pleasure of like sounds at the end of a line of verse. In a *coincide rhyme* the vowel and following consonants combine to give identical sounds while the preceding consonant is different. The rhyming syllable must carry a stress. The use of rhyme adds greatly to the intellectual pleasure in satiric and other intellectual verse; and to the emotive power of emotional verses. Double, and tri-syllable rhymes are found in comic verses, in which their use is alone suitable. Coleridge says: 'Double and tri-syllable rhymes, indeed, form a low species of wit, and, attended to exclusively for their own sake, may become a source of momentary amusement; as in poor Smart's distich to the Welsh squire who had promised him a hare:

Tell me, thou son of great Cadwallader  
Hast sent the hare? or hast thou swallowed her?

**RHYME-ROYAL** A stanza of seven iambic pentameters, rhyming *ababbcc*; so named because traditionally it was first

used by the royal poet James I of Scotland. Most skilfully used in Chaucer's *Troilus and Cressida*.

**SEPTET.** A stanza of seven lines.

**SESTET.** A stanza of six lines. The name for the second half of the Italian sonnet

**SHOTT MEASURE.** A quatrain consisting of 3xa, 3xa, 4xa, 3xa, rhyming usually on the 2nd and 4th

**SKELTONICS** Verses written in couplets of two anapaests to the line, the first foot being very usually short of a syllable. So called because Skelton used it a great deal. In modern verse used effectively by Hardy.

**SONNET.** A lyric of fourteen iambic pentameters, built usually in one of two traditional patterns (See Chapter V.)

**SPENSERIAN STANZA** The stanza invented by Spenser for use in his *Faerie Queene* Eight iambic pentameters and a concluding alexandrine, rhyming *ababbcbcc* A magnificent vehicle for slow-moving narrative and description.

**SPONDEE** Foot of two stressed syllables (— —) Used in English as a variation of the iamb. But see remarks on 'even feet' on p. 179

**STANZA** A collection of lines arranged on a definite plan of line lengths (very often identical) and usually rhymed. The word 'verse' is used in this sense, but should be avoided

**STRESS** The English system of prosody depends on stress. (See Chapter II.)

**STROPHE.** The primary stanza of the regular Pindaric Ode (as used by Gray, for example). (See Chapter VI.)

**SUBSTITUTION.** An essential feature in English prosody. The language refuses to run accurately into the iambic foot pattern. Sometimes the stress is inverted; very commonly an extra weak syllable appears. In either case the iambic foot is 'substituted' for another.

**TETRAMETER.** The line of four feet. The iambic tetrameter is the most delicate line in English. (See Chapter VII.)

**TROCHEE.** A foot of two syllables; long, short (—◦). Very often substituted for the iamb in English verse. (See *Narrative Blank Verse*, p. 176.)

**VERSE.** The correct name for the line in poetry. Loosely used as equivalent to stanza.

**WEAK ENDING.** See 'Feminine Ending'.



## EXERCISES

### RHETORIC

#### *I. Words*

1. Your smallest vocabulary is your writing one. Note any words in the Galsworthy, Bennett and Fisher quotations which you do not feel sure of, look them up and use them in sentences.

2. The scientist and imaginative writer use words in different ways. Jot down these differences. What is the difference in purpose behind their use of words?

3. Make a list of the parts of speech and briefly describe the uses of each. What happens when a language has no prepositions? How would the two sentences on page 28 from *Robinson Crusoe* be expressed without conjunctions?

4. It is always interesting to know the origins of words. New vistas of political and social history open as we track words down. For example, how many Portuguese words do you know of in your mother-tongue? How many Hindustani words in English?

5. Write a brief summary of the arguments in this chapter for the sensitive study of words.

o

#### *II. Using Words*

1. For what different purposes can Metaphor be used?  
2. Distinguish between Metaphor and Simile, giving examples.

3. Enumerate the different kinds of Irony, and provide examples of each kind from your own reading.

4. Argue the case for being economical with words.  
5. What considerations affect Word Order in an uninflected language?

6. What Figures of Speech are used in the following passages, and what is the effect of each?

- (a) He came into my lecture-room like a Fury
- (b) With the advancing storm, darkness settled over the mountain, so that its brow darkened in a frown and the whole dread mass lowered maleficently upon the plain
- (c) Selecting six hands to go with me, I went to do the job
- (d) He leaned over the parapet, motionless and keenly watching, like a hawk in the sky, all that went on below
- (e) The power of directing the local disposition of the army is the royal prerogative, the master feather in the eagle's wing
- (f) The news was a dagger to his heart
- (g) Athens, the eye of Greece
- (h) The doctors stamped out the epidemic
- (i) Coming events cast their shadows before
- (j) With beaded bubbles winking at the brim
- (k) There is a tide in the affairs of men,  
Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune  
Omitted, all the voyage of their life  
Is bound in shallows and in miseries
- (l) Vice is a monster of so frightful mien,  
As, to be hated, needs but to be seen
- (m) Good nature is the most precious gift of Heaven, spreading itself like oil over the troubled sea of thought, and keeping the mind smooth and equable in the roughest weather
- (n) Princes are like heavenly bodies, which cause good or evil times, and which have much veneration but no rest
- (o) as when two black clouds,  
With heaven's artillery fraught, come rattling on  
Over the Caspian,—then stand front to front  
Hovering a space, till winds the signal blow  
To join their dark encounter in mid-air
- (p) From the cradle to the grave
- (q) He keeps a good table
- (r) The power of the purse
- (s) You always come off a net loser, your treasury of experience depleted on balance, your vision of life more or less blurred, your register of experience smudged, your faculty for delight perceptibly enfeebled<sup>1</sup>

### III The Sentence

1 There are three types of sentences. State to which type each of the following sentences belongs.

- (a) But, my lord, you may quit the field of business, though not the field of danger, and though you cannot be safe, you may cease to be ridiculous
- (b) Whilst the authors of all these evils were idly and stupidly gazing on this menacing meteor, which blackened all their horizon, suddenly bursting, it poured out its contents upon the plain of the Carnatic

<sup>1</sup> C. E. MONTAGUE.

(c) The grave question now is, How far will this peculiar old system continue and how far will it be altered? I am afraid I must put aside at once the idea that it will be altered entirely and for the better

(d) As you lived without virtue, you should die without repentance.

(e) Freedom of thought, being intimately connected with the happiness and dignity of man in every stage of history, and being notably lacking in many countries, is rightly the most prized possession of civilized man today

(f) Contempt is the proper punishment of affectation, and detestation the just consequence of hypocrisy

(g) I will now describe an apparatus I have constructed to test the delicacy with which weights may be discriminated by handling them.<sup>1</sup>

(h) This is especially a day of professions. You will answer in my own words, that all ages have been ages of profession.<sup>2</sup>

(i) He remits his splendour, but retains his magnitude; and pleases more, though he dazzles less

(j) That India should be moulded into one nation, despite all the differences of race and religion and all the varieties of custom and language, is one of the miracles of the modern world.

(k) They feel reverence when they should not; they discern slights when none were intended, they discover meaning in events which have none, they fancy motives, they misinterpret manner; they mistake character, and they form generalizations and combinations which exist only in their own minds.<sup>3</sup>

(l) But the novelist will be assisted by no such feeling. Any reader may reject his work without the burden of a sin. It is the first necessity of his position that he makes himself pleasant.<sup>4</sup>

2. One type of sentence is nearly always used today. Which type is this? What are the reasons for the neglect of the other types in its favour?

#### IV. The Paragraph

1. The following sentences comprise three paragraphs at the beginning of *Gulliver's Travels*. Where do the second and third paragraphs begin? When you have decided, look up the original, and if you differ from Swift try to see why his decision is better than yours.

Soon after my return from Leyden, I was recommended by my good master, Mr Bates, to be surgeon to the *Swallow*, Captain Abraham Pannell, commander, with whom I continued three years and a half, making a voyage or two into the Levant, and some other parts. When I came back I resolved to settle in London; to which Mr Bates, my master, encouraged me, and by him I was recommended to several patients. I took part of a small house in the Old Jury; and

<sup>1</sup> GALTON

<sup>2</sup> NEWMAN.

<sup>3</sup> NEWMAN.

<sup>4</sup> TROLLOPE

being advised to alter my condition, I married Mrs Mary Burton, second daughter to Mr Edmund Burton, hosier, in Newgate Street, with whom I received four hundred pounds for a portion. But, my good master Bates dying in two years after, and I having few friends, my business began to fail; for my conscience would not suffer me to imitate the bad practice of too many among my brethren. Having therefore consulted with my wife, and some of my acquaintance, I determined to go again to sea. I was surgeon successively in two ships, and made several voyages, for six years, to the East and West Indies, by which I got some addition to my fortune. My hours of leisure I spent in reading the best authors, ancient and modern, being always provided with a good number of books; and when I was ashore, in observing the manners and dispositions of the people, as well as learning their language, wherein I had a great facility by the strength of my memory. The last of these voyages not proving very fortunate, I grew weary of the sea, and intended to stay at home with my wife and family. I removed from the Old Jury to Fetter Lane, and from thence to Wapping, hoping to get business among the sailors; but it would not turn to account. After three years' expectation that things would mend, I accepted an advantageous offer from Captain William Prichard, master of the *Antelope*, who was making a voyage to the South Seas. We set sail from Bristol, May 4, 1699, and our voyage at first was very prosperous.

2. In the following passage the writer, Gilbert White, makes four paragraphs of five sentences. Defend or dispute the author's arrangement.

As the morning advanced, the sun became bright and warm, and the day turned out one of those most lovely ones which no season but the autumn produces; cloudless, calm, serene, and worthy of the South of France itself.

About nine an appearance very unusual began to demand our attention, a shower of cobwebs falling from very elevated regions, and continuing, without any interruption, till the close of the day. These webs were not single filmy threads, floating in the air in all directions, but perfect flakes or rags; some near an inch broad, and five or six long, which fell with a degree of velocity which showed they were considerably heavier than the atmosphere.

On every side, as the observer turned his eyes, might he behold a continual succession of fresh flakes falling into his sight, and twinkling like stars as they turned their sides towards the sun.

How far this wonderful shower extended would be difficult to say; but we know that it reached Bradley, Selborne, and Alresford, three places which lie in a sort of triangle, the shortest of whose sides is about eight miles in extent.

3. The following passages each make five paragraphs in the original. The first is the eloquent appeal of a nobleman on trial before his peers. Remember that an orator will pause

after an effective statement and begin the new paragraph not merely for logical reasons but with a new emotive or intellectual appeal. The others are by famous nineteenth century scientists. Here the appeal is to the intellect and you will be guided by purely logical considerations in forming your paragraphs. Return these passages into paragraphs.

It is now full two hundred and forty years since any man was touched for this alleged crime to this height before myself. Let us not awaken those sleeping lions to our destruction, by taking up a few musty records that have lain by the walls for so many ages, forgotten or neglected. My Lords, what is my present misfortune may be for ever yours! It is not the smallest part of my grief that not the crime of treason, but my other sins, which are exceeding many, have brought me to this bar, and, except your Lordships' wisdom provide against it, the shedding of my blood may make way for the tracing out of yours. You, your estates, your posterity, lie at the stake! For my poor self, if it were not for your Lordships' interest, and the interest of a saint in heaven, who hath left me here two pledges on earth, I should never take the pains to keep up this ruinous cottage of mine. It is loaded with such infirmities, that, in truth, I have no great pleasure to carry it about with me any longer. Nor could I ever leave it at a fitter time than this, when I hope that the better part of the world would perhaps think that by my misfortunes I had given a testimony of my integrity to my God, my King, and my Country. I thank God I count not the afflictions of the present life to be compared to that glory which is to be revealed in the time to come! My Lords! my Lords! my Lords! something more I had intended to say, but my voice and my spirit fail me. Only I do, in all humility and submission, cast myself down at your Lordships' feet, and desire that I may be a beacon to keep you from shipwreck. Do not put such rocks in your own way, which no prudence, no circumspection, can eschew or satisfy, but by your utter ruin! And so, my Lords, even so, with all tranquillity of mind, I submit myself to your decision. And whether your judgement in my case—I wish it were not the case of you all—be for life or for death, it shall be righteous in my eyes, and shall be received with a *Te Deum laudamus*, we give God the praise<sup>1</sup>.

The chemist regards chemical change in a body as the effect of the action of the something external to the body changed. A chemical compound once formed would persist for ever if no alteration took place in surrounding conditions. But to the student of Life the aspect of Nature is reversed. Here, incessant, and, so far as we know, spontaneous change is the rule, rest the exception—the anomaly to be accounted for. Living things have no inertia, and tend to no equilibrium. Permit me, however, to give more force and clearness to these somewhat abstract considerations by an illustration.

<sup>1</sup> THOMAS WENTWORTH, Earl of Strafford

or two. Imagine a vessel full of water, at the ordinary temperature, in an atmosphere saturated with vapour. The *quantity* and the *figure* of that water will not change, so far as we know, for ever. Suppose a lump of gold be thrown into the vessel—motion and disturbance of figure exactly proportional to the momentum of the gold will take place. But after a time the effects of this disturbance will subside—equilibrium will be restored, and the water will return to its passive state.<sup>1</sup>

Physical science is that department of knowledge which relates to the order of nature, or, in other words, to the regular succession of events. The name of physical science, however, is often applied in a more or less restricted manner to those branches of science in which the phenomena considered are of the simplest and most abstract kind, excluding the consideration of the more complex phenomena, such as those observed in living beings. The simplest case of all is that in which an event or phenomenon can be described as a change in the arrangement of certain bodies. Thus the motion of the moon may be described by stating the changes in her position relative to the earth in the order in which they follow one another. In other cases we may know that some change of arrangement has taken place, but we may not be able to ascertain what that change is. Thus when water freezes we know that the molecules or smallest parts of the substance must be arranged differently in ice and in water. We also know that this arrangement in ice must have a certain kind of symmetry, because the ice is in the form of symmetrical crystals, but we have as yet no precise knowledge of the actual arrangement of the molecules in ice. But whenever we can completely describe the change of arrangement we have a knowledge, perfect so far as it extends, of what has taken place, though we may still have to learn the necessary conditions under which a similar event will always take place.<sup>2</sup>

#### V. Prose Forms

1. The novel requires a plot. What is the essential difference between a 'story' and a 'plot'?
2. Offer your own definition of an essay. Write a brief appreciation of an essay you have enjoyed, and show how your definition includes your choice.
3. What different purposes can an author have in writing a biography? Writing the biography of a man who died two hundred years ago, what sources of information can the writer use? Mention any additional sources he may enjoy if his subject is alive.
4. What do you think is the explanation of the popularity of autobiography today?

<sup>1</sup> T. H. HUXLEY, *Science and Education*.

<sup>2</sup> J. CLERK MAXWELL, *Matter and Motion*.

5. Modern dramatists often attack social wrongs. Discuss any play by Shaw or Galsworthy in which some custom or institution is attacked.
6. What are the special problems of the writer of short stories?
7. Why should research workers in any modern science condescend to popular writing on their subject?

## PROSODY

### *I. Introductory*

1. Scan the following lines, describing each in prosodical language:

The dew dries up, the star is shot.  
 And call the cattle home.  
 And never lifted up a single stone.  
 By the end of the day we had come to the hill.  
 Over hills and over hedges.  
 And set her by to watch, and set her by to weep.

2. Scan the following stanzas and describe them in language and in symbols:

Ye conscious stars, that roll above  
 To fix our fate below,  
 In solemn silence as you move  
 Be witness to my woe.

\* \* \*

Hush, my dear, lie still and slumber,  
 Holy Angels guard thy bed!  
 Heavenly blessings without number  
 Gently falling on thy head.

\* \* \*

To John I owed great obligation;  
 But John, unhappily, thought fit  
 To publish it to all the nation:  
 Sure John and I are more than quit.

\* \* \*

Vital spark of heavenly flame!  
 Quit, oh quit this mortal frame:  
 Trembling, hoping, ling'ring, flying,  
 Oh the pain, the bliss of dying!

Says my uncle, 'I pray you discover  
 What hath been the cause of your woes,  
 Why you pine and you whine like a lover?  
 'I have seen Molly Mog of the Rose.'

### III. *The Ballad*

1. Describe the ballad stanza in symbols as briefly as possible. What variations have been successfully used? And what effect does each of these variations have on the mood inspired by the poem?
2. What is the ballad way of telling a story?
3. What qualities of the ballad does this poem possess?

Analyse prosodically the third stanza.

Good people all, of every sort,  
 Give ear unto my song;  
 And if you find it wond'rous short,  
 It cannot hold you long.

In Islington there was a man,  
 Of whom the world might say,  
 That still a godly race he ran,  
 Whene'er he went to pray.

A kind and gentle heart he had,  
 To comfort friends and foes;  
 The naked every day he clad,  
 When he put on his clothes.

And in that town a dog was found,  
 As many dogs there be,  
 Both mongrel, puppy, whelp, and hound,  
 And curs of low degree.

This dog and man at first were friends;  
 But when a pique began,  
 The dog, to gain some private ends,  
 Went mad and bit the man.

Around from all the neighbouring streets  
 The wond'ring neighbours ran,  
 And swore the dog had lost his wits,  
 To bite so good a man.

The wound it seem'd both sore and sad  
 To every Christian eye;  
 And while they swore the dog was mad,  
 They swore the man would die.

But soon a wonder came to light,  
 That show'd the rogues they lied:  
 The man recover'd of the bite,  
 The dog it was that died <sup>1</sup>

*IV The Stanza*

1. Describe prosodically both in language and symbols the following stanzas and state the kind of subject-matter for which they can be used.

No borrow'd bays his temples did adorn,  
 But to our crown he did fresh jewels bring;  
 Nor was his virtue poison'd, soon as born,  
 With the too early thoughts of being king.

\* \* \*

Therefore they watch'd a time when they might sift  
 This hidden whim, and long they watched in vain;  
 For seldom did she go to chapel-shrift,  
 And seldom felt she any hunger pain,  
 And when she left, she hurried back, as swift  
 As bird on wing to breast its eggs again;  
 And, patient as a hen-bird, sat her there  
 Beside her Basil, weeping through her hair.

\* \* \*

Oh lift me from the grass!  
 I die! I faint! I fail!  
 Let thy love in kisses rain  
 On my lips and eyelids pale  
 My cheek is cold and white, alas!  
 My heart beats loud and fast,—  
 Oh! press it to thy own again,  
 Where it will break at last

\* \* \*

As for the rest, to come to the conclusion  
 Of this true dream, the telescope is gone  
 Which kept my optics free from all delusion,  
 And show'd me what I in my turn have shown,  
 All I saw further, in the last confusion,  
 Was, that King George slipp'd into heaven for one;  
 And when the tumult dwindled into calm,  
 I left him practising the hundredth psalm.

\* \* \*

He that is down need fear no fall,  
 He that is low, no pride,  
 He that is humble ever shall  
 Have God to be his guide.

<sup>1</sup> GOLDSMITH, *Elegy on the Death of a Mad Dog*.

Can there be any day but this,  
 Though many suns to shine endeavour?  
 We count three hundred, but we miss :  
 There is but one, and that one ever.

\* \* \*

Bid me discourse, I will enchant thine ear,  
 Or like a fairy, trip upon the green,  
 Or, like a nymph, with long dishevell'd hair,  
 Dance on the sands, and yet no footing seen :  
 Love is a spirit all compact of fire,  
 Not gross to sink, but light, and will aspire.

\* \* \*

'Go, get me hither paper, ink, and pen :  
 Yet save that labour, for I have them here.  
 What should I say ? One of my husband's men  
 Bid thou be ready, by and by, to bear  
 A letter to my lord, my love, my dear :  
 Bid him with speed prepare to carry it ;  
 The cause craves haste, and it will soon be writ.'

\* \* \*

His head was bound with pansies overblown,  
 And faded violets, white, and pied, and blue ;  
 And a light spear topped with a cypress cone,  
 Round whose rude shaft dark ivy-tresses grew  
 Yet dripping with the forest's noonday dew,  
 Vibrated, as the ever-beating heart  
 Shook the weak hand that grasped it ; of that crew  
 He came the last, neglected and apart ;  
 A herd-abandoned deer struck by 'the hunter's dart.

#### *V. The Sonnet*

1. Describe prosodically the difference between the Italian and the English sonnet, and note the effect upon the subject-matter.
2. Give a complete prosodical description of the following sonnets :

To me, fair Friend, you never can be old,  
 For as you were when first your eye I eyed  
 Such seems your beauty still. Three winters cold  
 Have from the forests shook three summers' pride ;

Three beauteous springs to yellow autumn turn'd  
 In process of the seasons have I seen,  
 Three April perfumes in three hot Junes burn'd,  
 Since first I saw you fresh, which yet are green.

Ah! yet doth beauty, like a dial-hand,  
 Steal from his figure, and no pace perceived,  
 So your sweet hue, which methinks still doth stand,  
 Hath motion, and mine eye may be deceived

For fear of which hear this, thou age unbred,—  
 Ere you were born, was beauty's summer dead

\* \* \*

When I consider how my light is spent,  
 Ere half my days in this dark world and wide,  
 And that one talent which is death to hide,  
 Lodg'd with me useless, though my soul more bent  
 To serve therewith my maker, and present  
 My true account, lest he returning chide,  
 'Doth God exact day-labour, light denied?'  
 I fondly ask. But patience, to prevent  
 That murmur, soon replies, 'God doth not need  
 Either man's work or his own gifts. Who best  
 Bear his mild yoke, they serve him best, his state  
 Is kingly. Thousands at his bidding speed  
 And post o'er land and ocean without rest  
 They also serve who only stand and wait'

3 The following sonnet by Spenser is experimental. How does it differ from the normal forms? Do these prosodical differences change the effect of the poem?

Fair is my love, when her fair golden hairs,  
 With the loose wind the waving chance to mark  
 Fair when the rose in her red cheeks appears,  
 Or in her eyes the fire of love does spark  
 Fair when her breast like a rich-laden bark,  
 With precious merchandise she forth doth lay  
 Fair when that cloud of pride, which oft doth dark  
 Her goodly light with smiles, she drives away  
 But fairest she, when so she doth display  
 The gate with pearls and rubies richly dight,  
 Through which her words so wise do make their way  
 To bear the message of her gentle sprite  
 The rest be works of nature's wonderment,  
 But this the work of heart's astonishment.

### VI. The Ode

1. From what kinds of ode do the following stanzas come? Analyse each prosodically.

So restless Cromwell could not cease  
 In the inglorious arts of peace,  
 But through adventurous war  
 Urged his active star

And, like the three-forked lightning, first  
 Breaking the clouds where it was nurst,  
 Did through his own side  
 His fiery way divide.

\* \* \*

From harmony, from heav'nly harmony  
 This universal frame began  
 When Nature underneath a heap  
 Of jarring atoms lay,  
 And could not heave her head,  
 The tuneful voice was heard from high,  
 Arise, ye more than dead.  
 Then cold and hot and moist and dry  
 In order to their stations leap,  
 And music's power obey  
 From harmony, from heav'nly harmony  
 This universal frame began:  
 From harmony to harmony  
 Through all the compass of the notes it ran,  
 The diapason closing full in man.

\* \* \*

The rainbow comes and goes,  
 And lovely is the rose,  
 And moon doth with delight  
 Look round her when the heavens are bare,  
 Waters on a starry night  
 Are beautiful and fair;  
 The sunshine is a glorious birth;  
 And yet I know, where'er I go,  
 That there hath past away a glory from the earth.

\* \* \*

'Weave the warp, and weave the woof,  
 The winding-sheet of Edward's race.  
 Give ample room, and verge enough  
 The characters of hell to trace  
 Mark the year, and mark the night,  
 When Severn shall re-echo with affright  
 The shrieks of death, thro' Berkley's roofs that ring,  
 Shrieks of an agonizing King!  
 She-Wolf of France, with unrelenting fangs,  
 That tear'st the bowels of thy mangled mate,  
 From thee be born, who o'er thy country hangs  
 The scourge of Heav'n. What terrors round him wait!  
 Amazement in his van, with flight combined,  
 And sorrow's faded form, and solitude behind.

'Mighty victor, mighty lord,  
 Low on his funeral couch he lies !  
 No pitying heart, no eye, afford  
 A tear to grace his obsequies.  
 Is the sable warrior fled ?  
 Thy son is gone. He rests among the dead.  
 The swarm, that in thy noon-tide dream were born ?  
 Gone to salute the rising morn.  
 Fair laughs the morn, and soft the zephyr blows,  
 While proudly riding o'er the azure realm  
 In gallant trim the gilded vessel goes;  
 Youth on the prow, and Pleasure at the helm;  
 Regardless of the sweeping whirlwind's sway,  
 That, hush'd in grim repose, expects his evening-prey.

'Fill high the sparkling bowl,  
 The rich repast prepare,  
 Reft of a crown, he yet may share the feast:  
 Close by the regal chair  
 Fell Thirst and Famine scowl  
 A baleful smile upon their baffled guest.  
 Heard ye the din of battle bray,  
 Lance to lance, and horse to horse ?  
 Long years of havoc urge their destined course,  
 And thro' the kindred squadrons mow their way.  
 Ye towers of Julius, London's lasting shame,  
 With many a foul and midnight murder fed,  
 Revere his consort's faith, his father's fame,  
 And spare the meek usurper's holy head.  
 Above, below, the rose of snow,  
 Twined with her blushing foe, we spread:  
 The bristled boar in infant-gore  
 Wallows beneath the thorny shade.  
 Now, Brothers, bending o'er th' accursed loom,  
 Stamp we our vengeance deep, and ratify his doom.'

#### *VII. The Iambic Tetrameter Couplet*

1. Describe the range of subject-matter which has been successfully expressed in iambic tetrameters, giving examples of your own.

2. Rewrite the following passages with scansion marks:

Observe the dying father speak:  
 Try, lads, can you this bundle break?  
 Then bids the youngest of the six  
 Take up a well-bound heap of sticks.  
 They thought it was an old man's maggot;  
 And strove, by turns, to break the faggot:  
 In vain: the complicated wands  
 Were much too strong for all their hands.

See, said the sire, how soon 'tis done:  
 Then took and broke them one by one.  
 So strong you'll be, in friendship tied;  
 So quickly broke if you divide  
 Keep close then, boys, and never quarrel:  
 Here ends the fable, and the moral.

\* \* \*

Great Sir, as on each levée day  
 I still attend you—still you say  
 'I'm busy now, tomorrow come';  
 Tomorrow, sir, you're not at home;  
 So says your porter, and dare I  
 Give such a man as him the lie?

3. Scan the following irregular lines:

To many a youth and many a maid.  
 Warble his native woodnotes wild.  
 Mirth, with thee I mean to live.  
 And sixthly, for my soul to barter it  
 For fifty times its worth to Carteret.  
 As when of old some sorceress threw.

*VIII. The Heroic Couplet*

1. Rewrite the following passages with scansion marks:

Of manners gentle, of affections mild;  
 In wit, a man; simplicity, a child:  
 With native humour temp'ring virtuous rage,  
 Form'd to delight at once and lash the age:  
 Above temptation, in a low estate,  
 And uncorrupted, ev'n among the great:  
 A safe companion, and an easy friend,  
 Unblam'd through life, lamented in thy end.  
 These are thy honours! not that here thy bust  
 Is mix'd with heroes, or with kings thy dust;  
 But that the worthy and the good shall say,  
 Striking their pensive bosoms,—*Here lies Gay.*<sup>1</sup>

\* \* \*

In days of old, there lived, of mighty fame,  
 A valiant prince; and Theseus was his name:  
 A chief, who more in feats of arms excell'd,  
 The rising nor the setting sun beheld.  
 Of Athens he was lord; much land he won,

And added foreign countries to his crown.  
 In Scythia with the warrior-queen he strove,  
 Whom first by force he conquer'd, then by love,  
 He brought in triumph back the beauteous dame,  
 With whom he's ster fair Emilia, came <sup>1</sup>

\* \* \*

Meantime a glorious revelry began  
 Before the Water-Monarch Nectar ran  
 In courteous fountains to all cups outreach'd,  
 And plunder'd vines, teeming exhaustless, bleach'd  
 New growth about each shell and pendent lyre,  
 The which, in disentangling for their fire,  
 Pulled down fresh foliage and coverture  
 For dainty toying Cupid, empire-sure,  
 Flutter'd and laughed, and oft-times through the throng  
 Made a delighted way <sup>2</sup>

\* \* \*

Upon a time, before the faery broods  
 Drove Nymph and Satyr from the prosperous woods,  
 Before king Oberon's bright diadem,  
 Sceptre, and mantle, clasp'd with dewy gem,  
 Frighted away the Dryads and the Fauns  
 From rushes green, and brakes, and cowslip'd lawns,  
 The ever-smitten Hermes empty left  
 His golden throne, bent warm on amorous theft  
 From high Olympus had he stolen light,  
 On this side of Jove's clouds, to escape the sight  
 Of his great summoner, and made retreat  
 Into a forest on the shores of Crete <sup>3</sup>

\* \* \*

Seraph of Heaven! too gentle to be human,  
 Veiling beneath that radiant form of Woman  
 All that is insupportable in thee  
 Of light, and love, and immortality!  
 Sweet Benediction in the eternal Curse!  
 Veiled Glory of this lampless Universe!  
 Thou Moon beyond the clouds! Thou living Form  
 Among the Dead! Thou Star above the Storm!  
 Thou Wonder, and thou Beauty, and thou Terror!  
 Thou Harmony of Nature's art! Thou Mirror  
 In whom, as in the splendour of the Sun,  
 All shapes look glorious which thou gazest on!  
 Ay, even the dim words which obscure thee now  
 Flash, lightning-like, with unaccustomed glow <sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> DRYDEN      <sup>2</sup> *Endymion.*      <sup>3</sup> *Lamia.*      <sup>4</sup> *Eptipsychidion.*

2. Which of the above passages moves most swiftly? Can you give the prosodic reasons for its superior speed?

3. The verses of *Lamia* are much more mature than those of *Endymion*. How can the prosodist show this from the passages just quoted?

4. What are the advantages of the closed heroic couplet for satirical subjects?

### IX Blank Verse

1. Here is a paragraph of Shelley's poem, *Alastor*, written as prose. Rewrite it in its original blank verse. (Every one of the seventeen lines is a complete iambic pentameter.)

There was a Poet whose untimely tomb no human hands with pious reverence reared, but the charmed eddies of autumnal winds built o'er his mouldering bones a pyramid of mouldering leaves in the waste wilderness a lovely youth, no mourning maiden decked with weeping flowers, or votive cypress wreath, the lone couch of his everlasting sleep —gentle, and brave, and generous,— no lorn bard breathed o'er his dark fate one melodious sigh: he lived, he died, he sung, in solitude. Strangers have wept to hear his passionate notes, and virgins, as unknown he passed, have pined and wasted for fond love of his wild eyes. The fire of those soft orbs has ceased to burn, and Silence, too enamoured of that voice, locks its mute music in her rugged cell.

2. What are the usual prosodical differences between narrative and dramatic blank verse?

3. Here is a difficult exercise which will fascinate the real student:—Shakespeare in writing his *Coriolanus* followed an Elizabethan translation of a life of his hero very closely. At times he merely turned this text into blank verse. One of these examples is printed here. Study the prose and verse texts and see how closely Shakespeare has been able to follow the original. Enumerate the changes Shakespeare has made and note whether they are merely to make blank verse of his text, to cut it, or to add ideas.

I am Caius Martius, who hath done to thy self particularly, and to all the Volscians generally, great hurt and mischief, which I cannot deny for my surname of Coriolanus that I bear. For I never had other benefit nor recompense of all the true and painful service I have done, and the extreme dangers I have been in, but this only surname a good memory and witness of the malice and displeasure thou shouldst bear me. Indeed the name only remaineth with me: for the rest the envy and cruelty of the people of Rome have taken

from me, by the sufferance of the dastardly nobility and magistrates, who have forsaken me, and let me be banished by the people. This extremity hath now driven me to come as a poor suitor to take thy chimney hearth, not of any hope I have to save my life thereby.

My name is Caius Marcius, who hath done  
To thee particularly, and to all the Volsces,  
Great hurt and mischief; thereto mischief may  
My surname, Coriolanus: the painful service,  
The extreme dangers, and the drops of blood  
Shed for my thankless country, are requited  
But with that surname: a good memory,  
And witness of the malice and displeasure  
Which thou shouldst bear me; only that name remains;  
The cruelty and envy of the people,  
Permitted by our dastard nobles, who  
Have all forsook me, hath devour'd the rest;  
And suffer'd me by the voice of slaves to be  
Whoop'd out of Rome. Now this extremity  
Hath brought me to thy hearth; not out of hope,  
Mistake me not, to save my life.



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